

PLAYS BY J B PRIESTLEY

DANGEROUS CORNER
LABURNUM GROVE
THE ROUNDABOUT
CORNELIUS
EDEN END
DUET IN FLOODLIGHT
BEES ON THE BOAT DECK
MYSTERY AT GREENFINGERS
TIME AND THE CONWAYS
I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE
PEOPLE AT SEA

PEOPLE AT SEA

A Play in Three Acts

by

J B PRIESTLEY



London

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CHARACTERS

in order of their appearance

FRANK JEFFERSON	Fourth Officer of the <i>Zillah</i>
RIPTON	A Steward
MILES	Second Wireless Officer of the <i>Zillah</i>
NONA STOCKTON	A young American passenger
PROFESSOR PAWLET	An elderly English passenger
ASHFORD MYRICKS	A middle-aged American passenger
MRS WESTMORELAND	An elderly English passenger
CARLO VELBURG	A Central European super-cargo
BOYNE	A deck-hand
MIRIAM PICK	Diana Lismore's personal maid
VALENTINE AVON	A well-known English author
DIANA LISMORE	A well-known English actress

All the action of the play takes place in the Verandah Cafe of SS *Zillah*, a ship of about 10,000 tons carrying passengers and cargo to Central America

ACT ONE *Morning*

ACT TWO

Scene 1 *Evening of the following day*

Scene 2 *Later that night*

ACT THREE *Two hours later*

People at Sea was first produced in London at the Apollo Theatre, on Wednesday, 24th November, 1937, with the following cast

Frank Jefferson	-	ANDREW LAURENCE
Ripton	- - -	FREDERICK PIPER
Miles	- - -	NEVILLE MAPP
Nona Stockton	-	CARLA LEHMANN
Professor Pawlet	-	EDWARD CHAPMAN
Ashford Myricks	-	MACDONALD PARKE
Mrs Westmoreland	-	MARJORIE FIELDING
Carlo Velburg	-	CARL JAFFE
Boyne	- - -	TORIN THATCHER
Miriam Pick	- -	VIVIENNE BENNETT
Valentine Avon	-	MARTIN WALKER
Diana Lismore	-	JEAN MUIR

The play produced by AURIOL LEE

ACT I

Verandah Café of SS ZILLAH, a ship of about 10,000 tons carrying both passengers and cargo and built for the tropics. A double-glass door at back leads to deck, and there is a door, panelled wood, at each side, well down stage. Between these and the main entrance at back are recesses fitted with tables and lounge seats fixed to wall. In the centre can be another fixed table with fixed chairs round it. The place is brightly decorated in a modern style. Against one wall, downstage, there is a large notice-board with various notices on it. If possible, the whole set should be designed and built slightly askew, to suggest that the ship has a list on her. Through glass doors at back we can see the deck. The railings should look as if they have been removed and then hurriedly put back, being not properly set. There should also be some suggestion of confusion and fire, a few blackened buckets, charred ropes, etc. Beyond there is a glimpse of a blue sea and sky. At rise the stage is empty and should remain so for a few moments, during which the noise of the sea slapping and hissing against the sides can be heard. Then FRANK JEFFERSON, Fourth Officer of the ship, enters from back. He is a pleasant-looking, manly fellow about twenty-eight, but at the moment looks extremely dirty—his white uniform being blackened and burnt—and almost completely exhausted. He leans against a table a moment, relaxing and mopping his face, then with an effort goes to door right, and calls

FRANK Ripton Ripton Bring it into the verandah
cafe Look slippy—for the love of Pete!

RIPTON (*off*) Just coming

Enter RIPTON, carrying cup of hot coffee and thick sandwich He is a ratty little Cockney steward, about forty-five, in a uniform soiled like Frank's

RIPTON Here y'are, Mr Jefferson Don't know what
it'll taste like but it's hot and wet 'Am sangwich too

FRANK Thanks, Ripton How did you manage to
make the coffee?

RIPTON Found a primus in the smoke-room pantry
S'all we've got till we can get below

FRANK We can get down for stores all right now
But you can't stay down Hot as hell Anybody else
in the smoke room pantry?

RIPTON Yes That American Big chap, they said
was a millionaire

FRANK Mr Ashford Myricks?

RIPTON That's him

FRANK What's he doing there?

RIPTON Cooking

FRANK (*surprised*) Cooking?

RIPTON In his shirt and trousers, with a frying pan
on that primus, singing Dinah from Carolina, an'
sweating like a bull Says if the ship won't cook him,
he's going to cook for the ship Says if he's not allowed
to cook, he won't play ball I don't know what he's
talking about—these Americans sound barmy 'alf the
time to me—but that's what he says If I can't cook, I
won't play ball

FRANK All right Let him cook Ask Mr Miles to come down here And take down a signal

RIPTON Is he sending, Mr Jefferson?

FRANK I don't know Shouldn't think so

RIPTON Are we all right now, Mr Jefferson, d'you think?

FRANK We ought to be—unless we run into another sea A big sea would put us under in an hour

RIPTON This is a nice life, isn't it? One night you're goin' to be burnt to death, and next night you're going to be ruddy well drowned

FRANK Well, you ought to have stayed down the Old Kent Road, Ripton

RIPTON I don't know anything about the Old Kent Road I come from Walthamstow, and if I'd had any sense I'd have stayed there But they'll have to pay me compensation

FRANK You wait till you're out of it first before you start talking about "compensation" You remember those big sharks we fish for off Colon——

RIPTON 'Ere, Mr Jefferson, for Gawd's sake!

FRANK Come on, ask Sparks to come down

RIPTON *gives him a reproachful glance, then goes out left* FRANK *continues eating and drinking* Then he goes to door at back and looks out anxiously for a moment, then returns to finish his drink and sandwich
WALTER MILES *enters left* He is a weedy-looking fellow about thirty, with a thin Cockney voice He is weary and unkempt He has paper and pencil with him
RIPTON *follows him and exits door right*

MILES (*rather hopelessly*) I'm trying to rig up a temporary set, just for sending It's your only chance But we haven't got it fixed yet

FRANK Who's the we?

MILES That chap Velburg's giving me a hand He knows a bit about wireless and he offered to help We ought to get something rigged up before to-night Got a cigarette?

FRANK *offers him case and he lights up*

FRANK (*taking paper and pencil*) I thought you'd have been ready to send now

MILES Oh—for God's sake—give me a chance—I can't work miracles, can I?

FRANK All right, Sparks, I didn't say you could Take it easy

MILES It's all very well saying "Take it easy" but what with one thing and another I'm just about all in With Wilson going sick, I've hardly been out of that wireless room since we left Colon I've had no proper sleep When I try to sleep, I can't

FRANK Try a hefty drink and then have a nap You'll feel better when you wake up Don't forget we're depending on you, Sparks I thought I'd better have a message ready for you when you can send again

He begins writing, while MILES leans on table and overlooks the paper

Steamship *Zillah* Colon to London Fire in holds One and Two Order given to abandon ship evening of 14th All boats got away safely except the last, owing to sudden squall and faulty condition of said boat——

MILES Just stuck together with paint, that's all
Let me get out of this, and I'll tell 'em something
Boats!——

FRANK All right Save it till you're home (*Continuing his report*) Captain Erikson swept overboard, presumably drowned Two passengers and seven crew missing Have you all their names?

MILES Yes

FRANK Remainder of boat's company compelled to remain on ship Fire out——

MILES Is it?

FRANK Near enough, I think But we can't get into the fore holds yet (*Writes again*) Ship now derelict No power and steering impossible Many plates buckled and bad starboard list, but still seaworthy in good weather

MILES What if it isn't good weather?

FRANK She'll go to bits Approximate position—latitude fifteen North—longitude seventy-two West Frank Jefferson, fourth officer, in command The only command he ever looks like getting too Following passengers still aboard Professor What's-it—Pawlet——

MILES Here I'd better write them down too I'll never read your writing (*Takes a piece of paper, finds pencil and writes*) Professor Pawlet

FRANK Ashford Myricks and his niece Nona Stockton

MILES Nona Stockton That's the good-looking little piece? That's the one I want

FRANK That's the one you don't get Then the cheery old girl—Mrs Westmoreland

MILES Mrs Westmoreland Don't remember her

FRANK You wouldn't You only remember 'em if they're young Then there's that dark, sinister-looking wench—Miss Pick

MILES I know She came up to the wireless room once or twice Hot stuff, if you ask me

FRANK I'm not asking you That's five The other's that lame chap who writes books—Valentine Avon

MILES I know Tight all the time

FRANK Tight or not tight, he's been very useful Then there's this Velburg, and you and me, Ripton, and one deck-hand—Boyne That seems to be the lot—eleven Want the list?

MILES No I want something to eat

FRANK Try the smoke-room pantry We can get down to some of the stores and we're all right for fresh water So it might be worse

MILES Unless the sea starts pounding us

FRANK Or the fire breaks out again Can't guarantee it won't

MILES What's our chance, Jefferison? Honestly?

FRANK Can't give you the odds But the minute you start sending, you tip them up So keep at it, Sparks Let's see—you married?

MILES Not likely—on what I make out of this ruddy job You're not, are you?

FRANK No Couldn't afford the ring—even There's nobody depending on me

MILES (*at door, gloomily*) There's somebody depending on *me*

FRANK Too bad Who is it?

MILES Me

Goes out FRANK *looks at the paper in a vague tired way, yawns, shakes his head, yawns again, and involuntarily closes his eyes* In a moment he is *dozing* NONA STOCKTON, a pretty American girl about twenty, is seen outside, looks in, sees FRANK, and enters She comes up and sees he is asleep and stands looking at him a moment, smiling He slowly opens his eyes

NONA 'Morning!

FRANK 'Morning!

NONA Gosh! you look as if you've been working

FRANK I have Meant to turn in for an hour

Begins struggling to get up

NONA Now don't try to get up Just relax You've never stopped since the hooter went last night and we all ran round in circles, and now you've put the fire out and everything It's about time I did something, but I don't know what Have you seen my uncle?

FRANK He's in the smoke-room pantry—cooking

NONA (*delighted*) I always said Uncle Ashford had it in him If he can cook, so can I I don't mean fudge and waffles either Real honest-to-God *cooking* (*Pauses, looking earnestly at FRANK*) I've got the biggest bottle of eau-de-Cologne just doing nothing, Mr Jefferson You wouldn't like me to wash you with it, would you?

FRANK Good lord, no!

NONA All right, all right But let me tell you, you've

just got to stop being the gallant British officer and gentleman or I'm going to throw things at you And don't try to keep me as the delicate young lady passenger, because I won't stand for it I'm just one of the gang from now on See! (*Seizes him by the arm He winces She lets go and looks at him and then at his arm*) Why did you do that?

FRANK Sorry Arm's singed a bit

NONA What's your name?

FRANK Jefferson

NONA But your first name

FRANK Frank

NONA You're a change from the last Frank I knew He crooned in a fraternity house band, and wore blue suède shoes, and fell for himself all over again every morning How do you like Nona—the name, I mean?

FRANK I don't know Never heard it before

NONA I think it's terrible, but I'm too proud to change it Well, Frank, I'm going to do something to that arm

FRANK Thanks, but it's quite all right

NONA If I'm a pest—say so

FRANK You're not In fact—— (*Hesitates*)

NONA Go on, say it

FRANK Well, I think you're a grand kid But mind you, I'm so tired I hardly know what I'm saying

NONA All right, I won't hold it against you (*Sees PROFESSOR PAWLET outside*) Here's the Professor Let's keep on the move or he'll nail us here for hours

The PROFESSOR has time to enter, however. He is a man about sixty, with a thoughtful and humorous face. He is dressed incongruously in odds and ends of costume. He is smoking his pipe comfortably.

PROFESSOR (*cheerfully*) Good morning, my dear! Ah, Mr Jefferson, I wanted to see you

NONA (*taking FRANK with her towards back*) I hate to, but we have to leave you, Professor. He's burned his arm and I'm going to slap cold cream all over him

PROFESSOR You see, Mr Jefferson—the fruits of command. Beautiful damsels dedicating their cold cream to your service. (*Sighs*) I ought to have been a man of action

FRANK It isn't too late, sir

NONA Come on

She leads him out at back. PROFESSOR comes down, smoking happily, then notices list of survivors that FRANK has left on table. He is considering this when ASHFORD MYRICKS enters right. He is a large middle-aged American of a type familiar as the heads of prosperous businesses—very clean, spectacled, solemn in manner but with a shrewd humorous mind. He is wearing a cook's apron.

MYRICKS (*with solemn anxiety*) Professor!

PROFESSOR Yes, Mr Myricks?

MYRICKS How were those fried eggs?

PROFESSOR Oh! excellent, excellent!

MYRICKS Now, Professor, I don't want compliments, I want real criticism. Bring that mind of yours to bear on the question. How were those eggs?

PROFESSOR The only flaw I remember was that one of them had been done rather too quickly and was—you know—rather hard and brown underneath

MYRICKS Thank you, Professor That's what I wanted Trouble is that primus is too darned fierce for easy frying I'm considering right now some browned hash—and then maybe—a stoo Yes, *sir* (*Indicating paper PROFESSOR is holding*) Have you been putting some profound observations down on paper, Professor?

PROFESSOR No First, I haven't any profound observations Secondly, if I had, I wouldn't write them down at this moment No, this seems to be a list of the members of our little community, Mr Myricks If we survive—we shall form a little society of our own We can experiment in social organisation You've settled your own problem yourself by dropping your function as a financier—probably dubious at any time, if you'll allow me to say so—and turning yourself into that most necessary member of any community—the cook

MYRICKS I went on a camping and hunting trip in the mountains one time, Professor, and I hurt my leg so I couldn't move far So I learned how to cook—biscuits and steaks and ham and eggs and coffee—from a guide we had, Old Pete, and I've been looking for a chance to cook ever since, I guess

PROFESSOR You're a very rich man, aren't you, Mr Myricks?

MYRICKS I was Then again I wasn't Whether I'm rich now or broke depends on what's happened to United Utilities stock

PROFESSOR You don't know?

MYRICKS I don't For the last twelve hours the ether must be getting jammed with messages for me from those boys in Wall Street—*Buy—Sell—Hold on—Ask For More Collateral—Oh Boy, We've Made It—All Over, Shoot Yourself* And here I am, and for the first time for over thirty years, I don't give a darn No, sir I'm busy cooking eggs, not balance sheets

PROFESSOR I congratulate you We don't want balance sheets here Though whether afterwards you ought to stay a cook or go back to finance is a question that can't be settled in a hurry Meanwhile, I see no use in our little community for a professor of philosophy

MYRICKS I don't know about a professor, but there's always use for a philosopher, I guess Plato would tell you to take charge

PROFESSOR True, but he was one of us We have our little disagreements, but we stick together in the long run, like good trade unionists, we philosophers

MRS WESTMORELAND *appears outside She is a brisk, sensible upper-class Englishwoman in her sixties*
The PROFESSOR does not see her and goes on

But I didn't imagine you were acquainted with Plato's Republic, Mr Myricks

MYRICKS I've had a look at it as one of the acknowledged high spots of the human intellect——

Breaks off, as MRS WESTMORELAND enters

Good morning, Mrs Westmoreland

MRS WESTMORELAND Good morning, Mr Myricks
Good morning, Professor Pawlet

PROFESSOR And a very nice morning too

MRS WESTMORELAND Yes, it's still quite pleasant to be alive, isn't it?

MYRICKS Have you had breakfast?

MRS WESTMORELAND No, I never take breakfast, thank you

MYRICKS Then I'll see you have something special later on

MRS WESTMORELAND That will be very nice I was thinking last night, when it all seemed rather hopeless, that it didn't very much matter—though of course I hated the look of that black water—because anyhow I can only expect a few more years and at least I'd be saved a lot of tiresome expensive illnesses, with everybody standing round, trying to be sympathetic but wondering all the time how much longer the silly old thing could hold out But now that I'm still alive—and the sun's shining again—I find I'm glad What do you think, Professor Pawlet?

PROFESSOR (*with the air of a man about to talk at length*) For nearly forty years I have been considering the nature of reality

MYRICKS (*cutting in, solemnly*) Professor, don't forget what you're going to tell Mrs Westmoreland, because I don't want to miss a word of it But right now I must go back to my pantry Now don't forget, tell me later.

MYRICKS *goes out right* PROFESSOR *stares after him* MRS WESTMORELAND *smiles*

MRS WESTMORELAND You were saying?

PROFESSOR For nearly forty years I have been

considering the nature of reality. Now there is a school of philosophy, influenced by Oriental mysticism, which has told us that what we consider ordinary reality—the movement of our physical selves in the physical world—is hardly more than an illusion, a kind of long dream. I always have a special contempt for that sort of philosophy. Yet last night, when every step we took should have been intensely real, when we were face to face with the great reality of Death, everything seemed to be part of an illusion, seemed to me essentially dream-like, as if we were actors in a scene hastily contrived for us. Very curious.

MRS WESTMORELAND (*rather drily*) Very. Perhaps you've been allowed to live to learn a little more. (*She looks at the notices on the board*) Bridge Tournament! That seems very far away now, doesn't it? Pity too, because my partner and I were doing very well, though the man kept grossly over-calling. It was a Mr Madares—a fat, buttery sort of man, from Brazil. I hope he's all right in his little boat. He has four enchanting daughters. He showed me their photographs. Ravishing creatures, though probably they'll be soon fat and buttery, too. Much prettier than my girls, but they won't wear anything like so well. That's the tragedy of Englishwomen, Professor Pawlet.

PROFESSOR What is?

MRS WESTMORELAND We begin to improve just when Englishmen *stop* taking any notice of us. (*Turning and seeing VELBURG entering*) Now—who is this?

CARLO VELBURG *is in his late twenties, fair Austrian in type and a not unattractive fellow.* But

there is something embittered, tragic in his face and manner He is very shabbily dressed He speaks English with a German accent

VELBURG I am looking for Mr Miles, the wireless officer—please

MRS WESTMORELAND I haven't seen him this morning Now—I don't remember you among the passengers and you don't look like one of the crew Tell me—who are you?

VELBURG I am not'ing

PROFESSOR Did you say you were nothing? Ah! Well, this is Mrs Westmoreland, and my name is Pawlet

VELBURG My name—it is Carlo Velburg

MRS WESTMORELAND Passenger or crew, Mr Velburg?

VELBURG No Not passenger Not crew Not'ing

MRS WESTMORELAND Well, no doubt you're busy—don't let us detain you

VELBURG (*with sudden passion*) You think it is a joke, eh? It is not It is tragic thing I am not'ing because I have no country And I cannot have a country because I have no passport I am not alive, I am not real, I am not'ing—because I have not this piece of paper, this passport

PROFESSOR My dear young man, I've heard about people like you, and I'm extremely sorry They won't let you stay anywhere, eh?

VELBURG No For ten years now I am sent away from everywhere (*Not without pride*) I have been in

prison in Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Jugo-Slavia, France, Belgium, England, United States, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Panama

MRS WESTMORELAND But—good gracious!—what had you been doing?

VELBURG Not'ing, Madam I had no passport I was born in Germany, but my father was Austrian, my mother a Jugo-Slav My father was killed in the War My mother took me to Dalmatia, and she died there because we had not'ing to eat—it was a—a——

PROFESSOR Famine?

VELBURG Yes Big famine in Dalmatia

MRS WESTMORELAND Dear me, was there a famine there?

PROFESSOR There were a lot of famines, in Central Europe just after the War, Mrs Westmoreland This isn't a very pleasant world, you know

VELBURG (*with bitter emphasis*) You think it is a world of people But as it is not any more It is a world of pieces of paper You think I am real—a young man, who wishes to work, to marry a nice girl, to have children, to drink a glass of beer and listen to music But I am not I am not'ing I have no passport

MRS WESTMORELAND But haven't you been able to *arrange* anything—through Cook's or something?

VELBURG No, it is not possible If I am rich—perhaps it would not be hard But I am not rich, very poor

PROFESSOR What an idiotic world to live in! Young man, if I'd been you, I'd have *stolen* a passport

VELBURG I have stolen three, but always I am found out and go to prison Afterwards, I am put on a ship—like this Go away—they say—you do not belong here That is why I say—I am not passenger, not crew, not'ing

As they are staring at him sympathetically, MILES enters right

MILES I was just coming up, Velburg Did you find those coils?

VELBURG I have found just one, but it does not look too good I came away to tell you I am very hungry now

MILES Okay, I'll carry on Go along there to the smoke-room pantry, and ask Ripton the steward, to fix you up

VELBURG Yes Afterwards I help you again

VELBURG goes out right

MILES The big set's hopeless, but if we can rig up a little temporary set, we can send out an S O S and give our position

PROFESSOR I suppose we've no electric power now, eh?

MILES No And what's left of the ship can't be steered Just a drifting hulk If you ask me, we're in a mess

MILES goes out back MRS WESTMORELAND looks after him distastefully and then looks at PROFESSOR

MRS WESTMORELAND If we're depending at all on that young man, I'm sorry What's left of him will break down very soon

PROFESSOR The other young man, Jefferson's all right

MRS WESTMORELAND Yes, he's a fine dependable boy

PROFESSOR Well, he's in charge now And the best thing he can do is to tell us all exactly how we stand and then allot us various tasks There must be *something* even *I* can do—besides talk I'll go and suggest it to him

MRS WESTMORELAND One of the most annoying things about these crises is the way one misplaces one's possessions Now I was doing a chair-cover in *petit-point*—it's been everywhere with me for the last twelve months—and now I can't find it and I feel *lost* without it

As PROFESSOR moves slowly towards door right, BOYNE enters and stands in front of it He is a big, brutal-looking chap about forty, dressed in torn shirt and trousers, and looking dirty and tousled He sounds half-drunk

BOYNE (*growling*) Ripton been along 'ere?

PROFESSOR That's the little steward, isn't it?

BOYNE (*contemptuously*) Yes—little, 'alf-starved Cockney

PROFESSOR I haven't seen him You look as if you put some hard work in, fighting that fire

BOYNE I look it and I bloody well feel it Had to use a big axe for four hours, cutting away that fancy wood-work they put in ships for people like you, just to kid you you're still at home and not at sea

MRS WESTMORELAND What's your name?

BOYNE Patrick Boyne What's yours?

MRS WESTMORELAND Mrs Westmoreland I've no doubt we're under an obligation to you, Mr Boyne, but I think we'd feel it still more if you weren't so anxious to let us know how much we owe you

BOYNE Yahl

PROFESSOR You're about done in, aren't you, Boyne?

BOYNE I've been treating myself to a drop o' spirits I don't often get the chance So I'm a bit above myself, see? And that's easy when you've had nearly thirty years in stokeholes and fo'castles, sweating your guts out for stinking grub and a few quid a month Just one of the mugs, that's what I've been

PROFESSOR (*who wants to get past him to the door*) All right, Boyne I want to go through there

BOYNE That's right Stand aside for the little gen'l'man That's what I've been doing too, for the last thirty years, after I've been sweating down below (*Mimicking command*) *Come on there, stand aside* Now I've been working like a bloody nigger all night to save your ship, and it's still *Stand aside* What about me staying here and you walking round just for a change, eh?

PROFESSOR Don't talk like a fool, man Nobody's trying to take advantage of you There's no class nonsense about this I want to go through that door and I can't do it if you're standing there, and it wouldn't alter the situation even if we'd hoisted the red flag (*Very sharply*) Thank you!

Almost involuntarily BOYNE moves a step away and PROFESSOR goes out BOYNE looks after him, grinning then at MRS WESTMORELAND

BOYNE Didn't think he had it in him

MRS WESTMORELAND I fancy Professor Pawlet has a lot in him Be careful you don't make that mistake once too often

BOYNE (*belligerently*) Who's going to make mistakes? Yer see—getting warned off right from the start The fire's out, so just keep your place, my man, that's it You people don't know you're born, lady, you've had it all so soft

MRS WESTMORELAND I've had seven children Try that next time you're on earth, Mr Boyne, and see how soft it is

BOYNE My poor old mother had nine—in a back room off the dock road in Liverpool You try that, lady, and then talk

MRS WESTMORELAND I'm sorry for your mother But not for you You're a big strong man, you should have done better for yourself

BOYNE So, that's a tip, is it? Every man for himself, eh?

MIRIAM PICK enters from back She is a dark, brooding, passionate woman about thirty, dressed in the neat clothes of a lady's maid

Hello, here's the nice handy piece that brought me a couple o' drinks last night Well here we are, miss, all safe and sound

MIRIAM Yes, but for how long?

BOYNE God knows!

MIRIAM Does he?

BOYNE Perhaps He does and then again perhaps He doesn't This lady says it's every man for himself in this world, and she ought to know, she's been sitting pretty in it for a long time

MRS WESTMORELAND You be careful, Mr Boyne It's quite true—you *are* getting above yourself

MRS WESTMORELAND *walks up to back and looks out* BOYNE *goes nearer to* MIRIAM

BOYNE My turn, this morning, miss Could you do a drink?

MIRIAM Yes And the stronger, the better

BOYNE You come with me

They turn towards door right, but before they can move, VALENTINE AVON appears in this doorway He is a man about forty, fairly good-looking and smartly dressed He walks with an obvious limp He is smoking a cigarette and carrying a glass half-filled with neat whiskey He is slightly tight

VALENTINE Good morning

MRS WESTMORELAND *turns at back*

MRS WESTMORELAND Good morning, Mr Avon

BOYNE (*to MIRIAM*) Come on This way.

They go out centre, VALENTINE watching them quizzically MRS WESTMORELAND *comes down*

MRS WESTMORELAND That man, Boyne, will want watching He's half-drunk already

VALENTINE He earned it last night (*Drinks*)

MRS WESTMORELAND Did *you*, Mr Avon?

VALENTINE I did what I could, Mrs Westmoreland

MRS WESTMORELAND You look very spick and span this morning

VALENTINE I still have my own cabin and things, you see I was lucky—being on the top deck—aft Turned in to sleep, about six this morning, but only managed an hour or two So—I rose—and dressed with great care—very, very slowly

MRS WESTMORELAND Did you have any breakfast?

VALENTINE Been having it for the last two hours

Shows her whiskey and cigarette

MRS WESTMORELAND Is that neat whisky?

VALENTINE Yes, I'm very much afraid it is

MRS WESTMORELAND Mr Avon—you're not half-drunk too, are you, by any chance?

VALENTINE Yes—I should say—just about

MRS WESTMORELAND Then I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself

VALENTINE Why?

MRS WESTMORELAND Because it's simply giving way before a crisis

VALENTINE You mean—I ought to be my ordinary normal self?

MRS WESTMORELAND Of course you ought

VALENTINE Then you're on my side, and you mustn't blame me Last night, I kept quite sober All night The fourth officer can prove it But this morning I decided that I oughtn't, as you say, to give way before

a crisis, I ought to be my ordinary self So here I am—as you rather crudely put it—half-drunk already

MRS WESTMORELAND I've been one of your admiring readers for years and you're not going to tell me, Mr Avon, that you're often in this condition

VALENTINE Certainly I am Of course I've developed a good technique for disguising it A perpetual slightly glazed eye A lazy drawl And of course my limp helps

MRS WESTMORELAND But why should a man in your position—a very successful author—with everything he wants—— (*Hesitates*)

VALENTINE Perpetually fuddle himself (*Stops to drink He is now leaning against one of the tables, at ease*) Well now, to begin with, my position, as you call it, is not as good as you think it is No doubt, in your opinion—and you may be sure I value it—I am still a very successful author But I trust you won't mind my saying that it isn't *your* opinion that makes a very successful author

MRS WESTMORELAND I don't suppose it is In fact, I've given up trying to understand what is behind literary reputations nowadays The rubbish I've had recommended to me! I don't believe *anybody* likes the stuff But what makes you drink so much?

VALENTINE I think I'm afraid of reality You see, Mrs Westmoreland, after my leg was shot to bits in the War, when I was still only a boy, I spent a long time in hospital, and there I began to amuse and console myself by living in a little dream world Pure escape, of course

MRS WESTMORELAND Why shouldn't you escape? A boy, shot to pieces, everything in him terribly hurt!

VALENTINE Yes Well, I found afterwards that I could write about this little dream world—you know—with its too beautiful gracious ladies, whimsical witty men, its cardboard cities and toy countrysides, its charming coincidences, its delicious little romances—all far, far away from the sweat and blood and tears and filth of the real world And you all liked these fairy tales of mine

MRS WESTMORELAND I did And I still do

VALENTINE Thank you But I haven't, for a long time That little world has worn terribly, terribly thin It's dropping to pieces, like my little reputation The game's nearly up

MRS WESTMORELAND You're not going to tell me you can't still make plenty of money, Mr Avon

VALENTINE No, that's not the trouble The trouble is, you see, I don't like it any more, and I can't do anything else, and I'm frightened I don't feel real I know I hardly exist any longer So the only thing to do—just to keep going—is—well——

He drinks to show her

MRS WESTMORELAND Mr Avon, I've been looking at and listening to men for a long, long time, and to this day I don't know whether to laugh or cry at their childish idiocy But surely you've built up some sort of life that means something to you? A wife? Children? A mistress? Friends?

VALENTINE No And, believe me, it's easy not to

when you're a fashionable scribbler, flitting about the earth The unreality runs through everything, you see

MRS WESTMORELAND Wasn't last night real enough for you?

VALENTINE No, because it was something pushed on to me from outside

MRS WESTMORELAND How old are you?

VALENTINE Thirty-eight

MRS WESTMORELAND You won't thank me for telling you, but in my opinion you're still just a young fool, nearer twenty than forty And even forty's no sensible age

VALENTINE You asked me questions and I've tried to give you truthful answers Please don't imagine I'm being sorry for myself

MRS WESTMORELAND That shows how young you really are Why shouldn't people be sorry for themselves now and then? All silly pride, pretending not to be I'm often sorry for myself, and make no bones about it As a matter of fact, I'm sorry for myself now—stuck on this ridiculous cinder of a ship—and I'm going to see if somebody will make me a cup of tea

VALENTINE Try the smoke-room pantry Can I——

MRS WESTMORELAND No, you stay here and finish your whisky and be still sornier for yourself Good gracious! If I were thirty years younger, I'd set about you

MRS WESTMORELAND *goes out right* VALENTINE *looks after her, obviously not knowing whether to laugh or be annoyed Then he goes over to the noticeboard and looks*

with sardonic amusement at the various notices there While he is doing this, DIANA LISMORE appears outside back, staring about her, looking in and then finally coming in, in an uncertain manner She is a glamorous creature—it is her profession—and she really is, with a great deal of real charm too, but the fact remains that she is in her later thirties and has not led a very sensible regular life Having just come out of a heavily drugged sleep, she is now very wary, and controls herself badly She is wearing—carelessly but gracefully—odd but good clothes, and also a pair of enormous dark spectacles She enters from the back, a completely bewildered woman VALENTINE is half-turned away from her

DIANA (*slowly*) I say, would you mind telling me what's happened—and where everybody is?

VALENTINE I'm sorry, madam, but I'm a stranger here

DIANA Either I've gone completely mad or you're Valentine Avon

He turns sharply at this, and stares at her She takes off her dark glasses

VALENTINE Diana! I didn't know you were on this ship

DIANA. I crawled on during the night at Colon and insisted on calling myself Florence Montgomery—I thought it might be testful And now will you tell me what's happened and where everybody is?

VALENTINE *Don't you know?*

She shakes her head weakly

DIANA Well?

VALENTINE Yesterday, the ship caught on fire They launched the boats There was a bad squall The last boat was smashed, leaving eleven of us stranded here The fire began dying down and we managed to put it out last night

DIANA So that's why everything seems even smellier and dirtier than usual

VALENTINE Yes, it's quite a different-looking ship now, y'know But where were you during all the hullabaloo?

DIANA Asleep

VALENTINE You couldn't have slept through all that!

DIANA I did You see, my cabin's that one by itself—right at the—at the back

VALENTINE Aft Aft

DIANA Aft I was too aft to notice anything

He looks closely at her

VALENTINE Diana, how long has this been going on?

DIANA I don't know what you're talking about, Val

VALENTINE How long have you been doping yourself?

DIANA I don't dope myself

VALENTINE I'm sorry, but you're still half-doped now

DIANA I had to have something I went down to Mexico, then to Central America, and that was a mistake and—and something else—went wrong I hadn't slept

for weeks I felt I was going mad I was desperate I had to sleep, I simply had to

VALENTINE I see But even now, it doesn't make sense They knew you were there, they wouldn't have left you Were you alone?

DIANA No, my maid was with me, sleeping in the outer cabin Oh!

VALENTINE What is it?

DIANA I've just realised what it feels like—to know that somebody wants to murder you Longing to see you dead I knew she was beginning to hate me

VALENTINE She may have simply lost her head, y'know Some people did Though even then I can't understand why the steward didn't get you up——

DIANA Because she took care that he didn't Probably told him I was already out You had to go through her cabin, you see, to get to mine Oh—the damnable Miriam!

VALENTINE That her name?

DIANA Yes Miriam Pick It sounds like a murderess, doesn't it?

VALENTINE Miriam Pick! But she's still here on the ship

DIANA My God! Val—I can't go roaming the ship—I feel like death——

VALENTINE Hadn't you better go back to your cabin?

DIANA No, the very sight of it now would give me

with your sort You treated me as if I was a half-daft slave you'd got out of prison I can be grateful I *was* grateful at first, but you soon knocked that out of me, with all your damned airs and whims and stinking selfishness If you couldn't eat, I hadn't to eat If you couldn't sleep, I hadn't to sleep If you wanted to whine and drivel about yourself, I had to listen till I was nearly crazy Then it was—*Take that, Fetch this, Hurry up* The glamorous Diana Lismore! Just a handful of silly monkey tricks No sense, no guts, and no real heart Tough as hell with me, or any fool of a man who'd fall for you, but soft as putty when you're up against anything Forever complaining and whining because they're all beginning to see through you——

DIANA Don't worry, Miriam I won't be soft any more

MIRIAM You won't believe me—but all the same I'll tell you something Yesterday, when that alarm went off and they were all shouting, I went into your cabin and called you And then when you didn't stir but just went on sleeping peacefully, then—for the first time for months and months—I didn't hate you, I felt sorry for you

DIANA And so left me to be drowned

MIRIAM Yes, left you to go on sleeping peacefully for ever

DIANA Very good of you!

MIRIAM Why, you fool, what more did you want? Haven't you been telling me for weeks and weeks and weeks that you'd nothing to live for? Didn't you say over and over again that you wished you were dead—if

you could only die easily? Weren't you going mad, you said, because you couldn't sleep? All you wanted was to sleep and sleep. You filled yourself up with dope—saying you didn't care how dangerous it might be—so that you could be sure of having a good long sleep. Well, why should I try and waken you up out of that sleep, try and get you over the side into a boat, still doped and half-crazy? You'd got what you wanted—and if the ship had gone down, you'd never have known about it.

DIANA I would. God!—it would have been awful, awful. Alone!

MIRIAM Well, now you're awake again. Suppose you're saved. Now ask yourself this—saved *for what?* To fill yourself with more dope? Or to keep somebody else awake night after night, telling 'em your life's over, crying about your disappointments—and there'll be plenty of 'em, they'll come in thick and fast—and asking God to let you have a nice long peaceful sleep. You're alive—but *what have you got to live for?*

DIANA The other thing—leaving me in that cabin—I might possibly have forgiven you. But for what you've said now—and the way you've said it—I'll never forgive you, never, never!

MIRIAM You might notice I'm not asking to be forgiven.

DIANA You're going to get what you deserve.

MIRIAM Better not talk too big, Miss Lismore. We're not off this ship yet. We may never get off it.

MIRIAM *stares defiantly at her* VALENTINE *enters hastily* As soon as he starts talking, MIRIAM *swings*

away and goes out DIANA *looks near to breaking down again*

VALENTINE Diana, in a few minutes we're all meeting in here—it's about the only comfortable place left I don't suppose you feel fit to meet the lot of them at once——

DIANA No, no Not now

VALENTINE Better go back to your cabin and rest

DIANA Thank you, Val You're being very sweet to me Strange we should meet like this—after—how long?

VALENTINE Eight years

DIANA Yes, I suppose it is Eight years When did you stop being in love with me, Val?

VALENTINE I don't know exactly You took some getting out of my system

DIANA What a foul way of putting it! As if I were an attack of something!

VALENTINE You were

DIANA Then you couldn't have been really in love with me

VALENTINE I was

DIANA Why were you, I wonder?

VALENTINE Because—I think—you seemed to be an inhabitant—the only one I'd ever met in the flesh—of that little unreal fairy-tale world I've always written about It was like meeting one of my own exquisite heroines You had all their qualities but of course an extra enchantment just because you lived independently

of me, had a life of your own Then when you appeared in my play, that did for me

DIANA It was a lovely little play, Val

VALENTINE No, it wasn't, my dear It was as cheap and false as hell

DIANA Dar-ling, you're not going all tough and proletarian, are you, like so many of these writers in Hollywood?

VALENTINE No I'm not going anything I'm just half a man on half a boat I must have just missed you in Hollywood, by the way

DIANA What a pity! They didn't tell me you were coming out I simply had to go The place was stifling me I said "I don't care even if I'm losing millions of dollars, I must go" So I went down into Mexico and then through jungles and things into Central America—I'm simply crazy now about the Mayan remains—what a marvellous civilisation!—and now I'm ready for the Theatre again, ready to create something for my own public again

VALENTINE I'm not an interviewer, you know Diana

DIANA Isn't that rather a stupid remark, Val?

VALENTINE You think so?

DIANA Yes You've changed You didn't make stupid remarks once What's the matter with you?

VALENTINE The matter is—I've come to the end, whether this hulk goes down or not, and I'm too weary to play your little game with you any more Let's have some truth before the sea swallows us You left

Hollywood not because it stifled you but because you couldn't get another decent part. You were "all washed up" there, as they say. You went down into Mexico and Central America with some man, probably a Latin American on the loose, and got into a mess. You don't know anything about the Mayan civilisation and don't care a damn. You're ready for the London Theatre again because it's all you've got left, and you're not too hopeful about that. I'm sorry, but you asked for it.

DIANA You ought to have some nice chats with my ex-maid, Miriam, Val—about me—and other things. She's just such another rough, honest creature as yourself. I didn't know you had it in for me too, and were just waiting, until somebody else had knocked me down, so that you could take a few good kicks at me.

VALENTINE I'm sorry, Diana. I wasn't trying to hurt you.

DIANA Why do *you* dislike me now?

VALENTINE I don't. There's something about you—even now—that wrings my heart. I don't dislike *you*, but I dislike myself. (*With tremendous emphasis*) I hate myself.

DIANA I see. But please remember I've only just wakened from a long sleep—the first I've had for weeks—and I'm all confused, bewildered, rather frightened. Like waking into a dream. The ship all charred and deserted. My maid leaving me to drown. You here. I really am what you said you were, a stranger here. (*Pauses, looking at him intently, then suddenly*) Oh—Val—you and I—a long wall somewhere—wistaria in the

rain—great bunches of wet blossom They were so close, so vivid, I could have put out my hand and touched them Where was that, Val? Can you remember?

VALENTINE (*hesitating*) No let's see

DIANA It doesn't matter It's all dead and gone
Youth all dead and gone

NONA *enters, young, fresh, eager and goes straight over to DIANA, who by great effort becomes her usual self again*

NONA Gosh, yes! I remember you, Miss Lismore I saw you in that Theatre Guild thing about Old Vienna, and then in some picture I was in high school then, and we were all crazy about you Sophisticated glamour—it just tore us kids wide open

DIANA And I always loved your New York audiences, so keen and intelligent and appreciative Let me see—you're——

NONA Nona Stockton Here with my uncle, who's having a great time now—cooking

DIANA Such an adventure, isn't it? So stupid of me to have missed last night, but I've always been late for everything, haven't I, Val?

VALENTINE Everything but the curtain calls

NONA We're going to work out now what our jobs are to be, aren't we, Mr Avon?

DIANA Then that's another reason why I ought to go and lie down I'm always lazy—quite useless—at sea

Enter BOYNE, MIRIAM and RIPTON from left

DIANA *turns to VALENTINE*

Which way do I go?

He takes her towards the back As they go out, MILES and VELBURG are seen waiting to enter, and do so, as soon as door is clear, while VALENTINE leads DIANA off right

NONA (*as MILES enters*) Have you got that set working yet, Mr Miles?

MILES Not yet, Miss Stockton But it oughtn't to be long now before we're sending out our S O S Don't you worry

NONA I'm not worrying Say, I *like* this It's fun

BOYNE You won't think it's fun if the sea gets up and starts hitting them buckled plates

MILES Shut up

BOYNE I won't You get your bleeding wireless going and don't give me orders

Enter right PROFESSOR PAWLET, ASHFORD MYRICKS and FRANK JEFFERSON, now wearing his white uniform coat and looking tidy He exchanges a grin with NONA The rest now disperse themselves, some sitting, some standing

FRANK We're not all here yet, are we? Have you seen the others?

VALENTINE now enters from the back

VALENTINE I've just left Miss Lismore with Mrs Westmoreland That's all right, isn't it? You don't want them

FRANK No, so long as someone tells them exactly how we stand (*Now addresses them all*) Well now, although this ship was officially abandoned, we had to stay in her, and I'm in temporary command As I'll

be held responsible for your lives, I expect you all—passengers as well as crew——

BOYNE Did you say crew?

FRANK I'm talking now, Boyne Keep quiet I expect you all to do whatever I ask you to do That's fair enough, isn't it?

MYRICKS Certainly, Mr Jefferson Only reasonable

FRANK We've plenty of stores and water In this weather the ship'll keep afloat all right, though of course we can't navigate her

PROFESSOR Where are we, Mr Jefferson?

FRANK Not in a bad position at all, sir About three hundred miles South of Haiti, and a bit less than that North of the Coast of Columbia At the moment we're drifting East by South Roughly towards the Windward Islands

NONA Cheers for the Windward Islands!

FRANK But they're a good eight hundred miles away

MYRICKS Say, are we near any regular shipping routes?

FRANK Yes, sir, fairly near The fruit lines go from Barbados or Trinidad to La Guaira, Curacao, Santa-marta, and on to Colon Once we can send out our S O S and our approximate position, we should be easily picked up

MILES If we can send out a message, the other ships can estimate our position And I'll try and have a temporary set working by to-night

PROFESSOR Well, then, here we are, a separate little

community, and the best thing we can do is to apportion out our tasks

FRANK I was coming to that sir Ripton will see to the stores, table, and cleaning And Mr Myricks and Miss Stockton have volunteered to do the cooking Miles and Velburg will be in the wireless room Now there'll have to be a look-out all the time Our safety will depend on that Boyne is the only seaman here, so he and I will have to divide the main watches

VALENTINE I'm no seaman, but at least I can use my eyes

PROFESSOR Just what I was about to say

FRANK Thank you, gentlemen You'll be in my watch, Mr Avon and Professor Pawlet, you'll be with Boyne I'll work out the times later

MIRIAM Wait a minute, what about me?

FRANK Oh—well—you'd better—y'know—make yourself useful—look after the ladies

MIRIAM I'm sick to death of looking after ladies Let 'em look after themselves for once I want to be on watch too My eyes are as good as any of yours, and I'm used to keeping awake——

FRANK All right, I'll see if I can fit you in Well, there you are It might be better but it might be a lot worse, and I've no doubt, with any luck, we'll be taken off within a day or two, and you'll go home, having had an amusing adventure, something to tell your friends about

NONA Gosh—yes!

BOYNE And then after that me and Ripton 'ere's walking the streets, rattling the last two coppers in our pockets, looking for another ship And they'll be putting that poor devil there (*Pointing to VELBURG*), back into clink 'cos he hasn't got a passport

MIRIAM He isn't the only one who might go into clink either

BOYNE 'Ello, 'ello, this is a bit o' news

FRANK Wait a minute, Boyne, we've had enough from you just now Who d'you think you are?

BOYNE Well, who do *you* think I am?

FRANK A deck-hand with a big mouth Shut it

BOYNE Same old carry-on Last night, when your ship was burning, it was *Good Old Boyne* Now it's——

FRANK I'll tell you—shut up

BOYNE *gives him a look, then swings away and goes out left* RIPTON *follows him*

MYRICKS (*quietly*) That big sailor's been hitting the liquor this morning

FRANK I know I'll have it all under lock and key very soon All right, Sparks, carry on

VELBURG (*as MILES moves*) I help him, yes?

FRANK Yes

VELBURG So that we can be rescued, eh?

FRANK Yes, of course

VELBURG And then I go on another ship and then to another prison because I have no passport

FRANK That's not our fault And it's better than drowning

VELBURG I wonder if it is

MIRIAM It's a damned rotten shame What's the boy done?

PROFESSOR Mr Velburg, for a world rapidly sinking into complete brutal idiocy, I apologise to you

VELBURG You laugh at me, eh?

PROFESSOR Good Lord, no!

MILES Come on, Velburg

MILES goes out back and VELBURG hastily follows him

NONA Uncle, either leave me with that pantry or come and snap into it

MYRICKS You take your orders from me, girl

NONA I can cook the pants off you

MIRIAM You're having a lot of fun, aren't you?

NONA Yes, why not

*They look at one another, then MIRIAM goes out left
NONA looks at FRANK, raises her eyebrows, winks, then
goes out right with her uncle*

VALENTINE How's the glass, Jefferson?

FRANK Still rising—thank God!

VALENTINE If it suddenly drops, I take it, we're sunk

FRANK It wouldn't be too healthy

VALENTINE Well, we're all in the same leaky boat

PROFESSOR We have always been, my dear sir, but who cares, who cares? You know, this little community of ours, this microcosm of society, doesn't strike me as

ACT I

PEOPLE AT SEA

being very Utopian I detect in its structure already
certain dangerous flaws and wayward tendencies

FRANK If you mean there might be trouble, Professor Pawlet, you're not far wrong

FRANK *goes out* The PROFESSOR *pulls a typescript out of his pocket and begins to read*

VALENTINE (*going out*) I need a drink

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE I

Evening of the following day SCENE same as before except that now it is lighted with emergency oil lamps, making several pools of lights In one of them, MRS WESTMORELAND, DIANA, VALENTINE, and MYRICKS are playing bridge MRS WESTMORELAND and VALENTINE against DIANA and MYRICKS, who is still wearing a cook's apron and is smoking a cigar The others are dressed in ordinary tropical clothes Away from them, PROFESSOR PAWLET is smoking a pipe and reading Door at back can be open, to show deep night, and just a faint glitter of stars Sea can be heard The four play in silence for a few moments, finishing a hand played by MRS WESTMORELAND

MRS WESTMORELAND Thirty below and thirty above I think you might have given me two, partner

VALENTINE I hadn't one and a half quick tricks, y'know (*Suddenly laughs*)

MYRICKS What's the joke?

VALENTINE I suddenly thought how idiotic it was—to be sitting here, in a burnt-out ship, drifting about the Caribbean—saying “I hadn't one and a half quick tricks, y'know”

MRS WESTMORELAND It would be just as idiotic if we were simply sitting here, *not* playing bridge

DIANA After all, the whole world's a sort of burnt-out thing, isn't it, careering round and round?

PROFESSOR Probably not

MYRICKS How d'you make that out, Professor?

PROFESSOR Probably the world isn't moving at all in the way we think it is, and probably it isn't even a globe

MYRICKS Now wait a minute——

PROFESSOR We know that the universe is at least four-dimensional. What we see and what science investigates is merely a three-dimensional cross-section of a four or multi-dimensional reality. So we haven't the least idea what things are really like.

DIANA Are you being a comfort or not?

PROFESSOR Probably not

VALENTINE What's that monster of a script you've got?

PROFESSOR I've been engaged on this work for the last five years, and I think I can say it is a massive piece of reasoning. It's called the Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Conditioned values.

DIANA Does that mean anything?

PROFESSOR Certainly, Miss Lismore. It means

MRS WESTMORELAND (*firmsly*) It's your deal, Mr Myricks.

MYRICKS Oh—certainly—Mrs Westmoreland.

MRS WESTMORELAND I think that's why one likes cards more and more, the older one gets. One knows what they're really like and where one is with them.

The King of Spades stays the King of Spades and doesn't turn into something else And he'll always win the trick above the Queen or Knave All very dependable

VALENTINE That's what we think about him But perhaps *he* thinks he's having the most extraordinary adventures

DIANA You're not going all whimsical, are you, Val?

VALENTINE No But I was wondering if higher beings could play cards with us—I mean, use us in that way

PROFESSOR Assuming, for the moment, the existence of beings of an infinitely higher power——

MRS WESTMORELAND No, you don't, Professor Pawlet, not now We must finish this rubber Your call, Mr Myricks

MYRICKS Heart

VALENTINE Spade

DIANA No bid

MRS WESTMORELAND Two No Trumps!

MYRICKS A-ha!

MRS WESTMORELAND Yes—ah-ha!

MYRICKS Well—by me

VALENTINE No Bid

DIANA No Bid

MRS WESTMORELAND *begins playing* NONA and FRANK, *who have now the appearance of lovers, stroll in but do not come in far* PROFESSOR *looks up and smiles at* NONA, *who is looking very happy*

PROFESSOR What have you two been doing?

NONA Looking at the stars

PROFESSOR Which stars?

NONA I don't know—just stars

PROFESSOR Ah!

NONA It's a night and a half out there Everything turned on Heavenly Isn't it, Frank?

FRANK *nods* DIANA *has been staring at them with a certain wistful envy*

MRS WESTMORELAND You to play, Miss Lismore

DIANA Oh!—sorry

She plays NONA looks at FRANK and nods her head in direction of door at back He nods and smiles, and they go out again We catch a glimpse of her putting her hand in his arm as they stand a moment outside, still in the light, and then they walk away PROFESSOR looks after them smiling, then returns to his book The bridge players finish their game

MRS WESTMORELAND (*briskly*) The rest are mine Seventy below And another thirty And seven hundred for rubber Twelve hundred altogether, I think Thank you—partner

MYRICKS Well, Miss Lismore, they had the luck, I guess

DIANA I never have *any* luck, and I'm a rotten player, so why I ever bother with it, I don't know

MYRICKS Well, what about a drink? I'll ring while you're making your minds up

VALENTINE Ring!

MYRICKS Gosh!—I was forgetting Honestly, I wasn't fooling Clean forgotten Just habit That shows you, doesn't it, Professor?

PROFESSOR It was the temporary abstraction of the cards that did it, of course Our minds——

DIANA This morning, I was quite furious when I woke up because there wasn't any orange juice I rang several times before I realised where I was

MYRICKS I've got some orange juice in my pantry Tell me the time you want it, Miss Lismore, and I'll bring you some in the morning

VALENTINE Don't spoil her, Myricks This is her one chance to find out what life's really like

MRS WESTMORELAND And what is it really like?

VALENTINE Well—bells and orange juice in the morning aren't part of it Only a lucky accident

DIANA That's rubbish, Val You'll say next it's a lucky accident we have shoes to wear and aren't going barefoot

VALENTINE No, I'd say that shoes can be taken for granted But only about two pairs—and shabby at that Fifteen pairs of new ones—a different colour for every dress—they're certainly a lucky accident And whoever you are, you may have to say good-bye to all that at any moment

PROFESSOR It's a question of striking a balance of what may reasonably be expected, by a member of one of the so-called civilised communities Now——

MRS WESTMORELAND We may have to say good-bye to everything yet The minute I get outside this

room, where one doesn't notice much, I've no confidence whatever in the ship or what's left of it

VALENTINE I've never had any confidence whatever in any ship The owners know that, and that's why they try to disguise the fact that they are ships and make them look like the Midland Hotel, Manchester

DIANA I knew a Broadway manager who spent four days at the Savoy—he was drunk or had 'flu or something—under the impression that he was still in the *Berengaria*

Enter VELBURG from back He shows traces of some excitement

VELBURG The officer—he is not here?

PROFESSOR (*as they all turn and stare*) He's out on deck

MRS WESTMORELAND What's happened, Mr Velburg?

VELBURG At last—we have got a message through
They re-act at once to this

Only bits of message It is still difficult The set is bad But there is a ship—the *Orsata*—and they have answered us It is a cruise ship

VALENTINE How far away is she?

VELBURG We cannot tell properly yet It is difficult Six hours? Twelve hours? But she is coming to us

MYRICKS Then we're saved

VELBURG Yes, *you* are saved

MYRICKS Sure! And so are you

VELBURG I need also a piece of paper—a passport—before I am saved

Goes out, back, to find FRANK The others rise, except PROFESSOR, and show considerable animation

MRS WESTMORELAND Well, that's that I knew it would be all right I've never really been worried

VALENTINE Except—you know—the *Orsata* isn't here yet A lot of things can happen at sea

DIANA Val, don't be a misery

PROFESSOR Mr Avon, you seem to me to lack confidence in life—that instinctive animal faith——

VALENTINE Yes, I do Don't you?

PROFESSOR On the whole—no

MRS WESTMORELAND Neither do I

MYRICKS I'm with you Things don't always pan out too well—look at the market—but you believe in life and it'll take care of you

VALENTINE It's all a question of dates You three were brought up in the age of security You just can't help feeling secure But there's twenty years between us and that makes all the difference I can't help feeling insecure As soon as I hold something comfortably in my hands, I wonder how soon somebody's going to take a crack at it and blow it to hell

DIANA If you're going to do the well-known *Lost Generation* act, Val, I'm going straight to bed The Great War's been over a long time now

VALENTINE It hasn't It's never stopped And for all we know, the Still Greater War might have started now

MRS WESTMORELAND Don't be absurd! What's the use of worrying about what might happen The point

is—and you ought to be thankful—that we're not burnt to death or drowned and apparently the *Orsata* is on her way to rescue us And, really, what more could you want? You're extremely ungrateful, Mr Avon (*Moves, then smiles at him*) Probably you've too much imagination

VALENTINE What! You can tell me that and then say you've read my novels

MRS WESTMORELAND Certainly I think your stories are full of imagination

VALENTINE They're not They haven't had any real imagination in them for years and years They're drivel

MRS WESTMORELAND It's rather dark out there Will one of you please see me as far as my cabin door?

All three men step forward, but MYRICKS is first
Thank you, Mr Myricks Good-night I don't know whether I'll sleep, but I'm going to try

The others say Good-night as she goes, accompanied by MYRICKS

PROFESSOR A very charming woman, with a great deal of character

DIANA Too much when she's playing Bridge Now what will you say about me after I've gone out, Professor Pawlet?

VALENTINE Don't tell her

DIANA Shut up, Val! I want to know Honestly now!

PROFESSOR Well—now——

DIANA Charming?

PROFESSOR Certainly And beautiful

DIANA Really? Beautiful?

PROFESSOR Unquestionably

VALENTINE This is making me feel sick

DIANA Go away then (To PROFESSOR) Character?

PROFESSOR Shall I tell you?

VALENTINE Yes, go on, tell her Give her the works

PROFESSOR You've lived, of course, in a world that is quite strange to me

VALENTINE And thank your stars for that, Professor! It's a lunatic world—hers——

DIANA You ought to know

VALENTINE I do (To PROFESSOR) Go on Tell her the truth She never hears it

DIANA No, never! Just worshipped by everybody I am Sheltered and shielded all the time!

PROFESSOR Most of us go through life feeling that though we may not be much to look at there is *something* about us—a natural shrewdness, kindness, humour, whatever it may be—that might possibly repay those who will take the trouble to know us better

VALENTINE True!

PROFESSOR But you, Miss Lismore, create an immediate effect You cannot help it Even if your profession didn't insist upon your doing so, you would still create an immediate effect Men desire you Women envy you Even sensible persons——

DIANA Professors of philosophy?

PROFESSOR Yes I say, even sensible persons react at once to you

DIANA There now! Go on

PROFESSOR Unlike most of us then, your reality is in your appearance

DIANA Well—I don't know about that

PROFESSOR Exactly Now, like the rest of us, you can't help feeling that your *real* self is behind this appearance, that you too have a *something* But the immediate effect of your appearance is so astonishing, the reaction to it so strong, that the real self behind—with its *something*—always appears inadequate Therefore you feel that nobody really knows you, understands you, or really cares about you

DIANA I say—— Go on

PROFESSOR Therefore you find it impossible to live in a real world of persons So you live in a world of sensations But a world of sensations—without persons and their relationships—is a false world, and one that is for ever shrinking——

DIANA Stop it! (*Regarding him with mixed alarm, wonder and admiration*) You devil!

PROFESSOR Thank you

DIANA D'you know, deep down I always thought people like you didn't really know anything worth knowing, that it was all bluff

PROFESSOR Bluff comes into it There's nearly as much bluff inside universities as there is outside

DIANA (*indicating VALENTINE*) Do him some time for me, please

VALENTINE He needn't I can do myself, thank you It's a pity we're apparently being rescued so soon This

might have been the most profitable trip you'd ever made, Diana

DIANA I know Rough stuff for the spoilt darling, eh?

VALENTINE Yes, and why not? As it is, I suppose in eight hours time, you'll be queening it on the *Orsata*——

DIANA Yes, and what a story for the Press!

VALENTINE It's time we started being real people and not stories for the Press

DIANA Your real people are only people who'd like to be news but can't

VALENTINE They aren't I don't mean half-dead half-wits I'm talking about *real people*

DIANA Well, *where* are they and *who* are they?

PROFESSOR Here I'm one

DIANA Yes, Professor, you're sweet No, you're not, you're a devil Pity the *Orsata's* on a cruise I loathe the sort of people who go on cruises

VALENTINE Yes, and won't it be terrible if they haven't just the right kind of orange juice?

DIANA You won't believe it, but he used to be quite charming And he'll have to be charming again when we get on to the *Orsata* and he meets his dear public again

As she smiles maliciously at VALENTINE and he glares at her, MILES enters right hurriedly, very agitated

MILES Where's Jefferson? Somebody's broken the set

VALENTINE What?

MILES I said, somebody's broken the set Deliberately smashed it Just now I wasn't out of the wireless room two minutes That girl said she could see something—a light

DIANA What girl?

MILES Your maid or whatever she is

DIANA Miriam Pick! Don't trust her a yard That woman's ready to smash anything

MILES It wasn't her How could it be when I was with her, out on deck, when the set was smashed?

DIANA Well, I'll bet she's something to do with it She wouldn't care if we all drowned

VALENTINE Oh, drop it, Diana That doesn't make sense

DIANA It does to me

MILES We were just getting something through from the *Orsata* My God!—what a thing to happen! Quite deliberate Must have been You can see for yourselves I must find Jefferson

Goes out back hurriedly The other three look at one another

PROFESSOR He's almost hysterical

VALENTINE Well he might be Our lives depend on that set working I'm going up to have a look at it

As he arrives at door right MIRIAM opens it and looks in Then she comes in slowly, and VALENTINE goes out

MIRIAM (to PROFESSOR) Boyne says it's time for you to go on watch

DIANA Boyne says!

PROFESSOR That's all right, Miss Lismore Boyne's my superior officer for the time being After all, he's a seaman and I'm not Quite right

PROFESSOR *picks up book and goes out left* MIRIAM and DIANA *look at one another*

DIANA Well, I suppose you're going to tell me now that you had the wireless set smashed just because you were sorry for me

MIRIAM What do I know about it? I thought I saw a light and so I called that wireless fellow——

DIANA I know So it couldn't have been you But it's very strange—isn't it?—that as soon as you take him away from his wireless room, somebody pops in and breaks the set

MIRIAM Hadn't you better say I knew all about it? Go on, don't mind me

DIANA No, I don't say that I'm just wondering, that's all

MIRIAM Have you ever thought that if I told all I know about you, it wouldn't look very good in the papers?

DIANA So that's it! Well, it won't work You can't frighten me Nothing *you* say will get into the papers I'll see to that Once we're off this ship, you'll be too busy trying to talk yourself out of gaol——

MIRIAM So you're going to have me charged?

DIANA I mightn't have done—if you hadn't come here now—telling me what you could say about me Go on, try saying it

MIRIAM Listen, why don't you give me a chance Look what a life I've had You've had all the luck You're alive You'll be rescued soon You'll get some publicity out of it—and that's what you want, isn't it?—so you'll be better off than before Well then, leave me alone Let me go

DIANA Yes—and have you trying to blackmail me in a month You think I'm weak Always have done You're wrong

MIRIAM You won't—let it drop?

DIANA No

MIRIAM Damn you! I might have known All right Go on Be tough then

VALENTINE enters right quickly as the two women stare at one another

VALENTINE Broken—and I'd say—quite deliberately Now who on earth could have done such a damnably idiotic thing?

VALENTINE breaks off, noticing the tenseness of the two women MIRIAM, a look of fury fixed on her face, passes him going out right He looks after her, then looks at DIANA He comes nearer and drops his voice Diana—that maid of yours is an extraordinary woman What a devilish look she can put on!

DIANA Yes And don't think she's just amusing herself pulling faces either

VALENTINE What have you been saying to her—to make her look like that?

DIANA She tried to frighten me and bluff me—and she couldn't—that's all

VALENTINE Not being a shade too hard on her, were you, Diana?

DIANA No, Val, and please mind your own business

VALENTINE Certainly not Where did you find her?

DIANA I took her out of a Birmingham slum, three or four years ago We were trying out *The Octopus* there—and Agnes—you remember her?—

VALENTINE Yes, Agnes and I had the deepest sympathy for one another—as well we might have

DIANA My God, you are insulting these days, Val I can't imagine how I ever cared tuppence about you

VALENTINE I doubt if you did But what about this Miriam Peck? Did Agnes suddenly walk out on you and this girl take her place?

DIANA Yes, she'd been a programme girl or bar-maid or something at the theatre, and came round and devoured me with those queer eyes of hers and said she'd always worshipped me—you know the stuff—so I took her on, let her go with me everywhere, gave her good wages and lots of things, treated her like a friend

VALENTINE Poor woman!

DIANA Don't be funny! I gave her a marvellous time, and now after three years of it—

VALENTINE She hates you like poison Queer, isn't it?

DIANA Yes, it *is* queer,—queer, queer, queer—

VALENTINE Strange, fantastic, inexplicable!

DIANA Yes, all those things—you sneering, conceited drunk!

VALENTINE Thanks May I offer *lame sot* as being even stronger and shorter?

DIANA I'm sorry I don't know what's the matter with me

VALENTINE I suppose we're going to be rescued But I doubt if we're worth it

Enter MYRICKS from back DIANA *perks up at once*

DIANA Mr Myricks, are you good now at escorting females to their cabins?

MYRICKS Miss Lismore, I do a swell job as escort Try me (*As she goes up to join him*) Avon, I hope you're not going to feel too bad about this—but you see, the best man's winning

VALENTINE I know I'm getting very rickety in my old age Soon need an escort myself Good-night, Diana

DIANA Good-night Furious with me?

VALENTINE No Wish I was I'm too far down Just sunk *Sunk—not drunk*

VALENTINE *turns away, to take out and light a cigarette She looks at him a moment, then turns and smiles at MYRICKS, who is waiting for her, and goes out back with him Left to himself, VALENTINE is now a picture of brooding, tragic misery He leans against a table, smoking without enjoyment, staring unhappily at nothing After a few moments, NONA enters from back, looking young and radiant*

NONA Hello

VALENTINE Hello

NONA Mr Avon, you're looking terribly down

VALENTINE And you're looking awfully up I believe you've just been kissed

NONA You're right at that And I liked it

VALENTINE You make me feel about a hundred and ten

NONA Then it's time you were in bed Don't you go on watch early in the morning with Frank—Mr Jefferson?

VALENTINE Make it Frank Yes

NONA Then you ought to turn in Frank's going to—as soon as he's talked to Boyne Don't you feel sleepy?

VALENTINE No I need a drink, and I haven't got one

NONA I know where there's half a bottle of Scotch—if you'd like that

VALENTINE I should like it Bless you!

NONA But you've got to promise to go and rest then—so you'll be all right for your watch

VALENTINE It's a bargain

Sound of voices outside

NONA Come on, then

She leads the way out After a moment, FRANK enters followed by BOYNE, who is half drunk They have been talking and now continue

FRANK Don't give me any of your hard luck stuff, Boyne You're just a dam' fool, and if you weren't, you wouldn't be still a deck hand—after all your experience Every time you might have done some-

thing for yourself, you've gone and botched it That's what you've done now

BOYNE 'Ow d'you mean?

FRANK You did a good job the night of the fire, and it might have got you somewhere But I told you to leave that drink alone, and you wouldn't And now you—or somebody in with you—has stolen the key, and you've got at it again Where's that key?

BOYNE I haven't got the key

FRANK Don't talk to me like that

BOYNE What d'yer think we're in—the *Queen Mary*?

FRANK No, but we're in a ship, and I'm in temporary command of her—and you'll talk to me properly Where's that key? If you haven't got it, you know who has, because you've been drinking again

BOYNE Me? Drinkin'? Mr Jefferson——!

FRANK Drop it, you big ape Where's Ripton?

BOYNE I dunno An' don't call me a big ape

FRANK I'll call you what I like

BOYNE That's ri' What *you* like! I'm not 'uman, am I—just because I haven't got a pretty little stripe on me coat——

FRANK Oh—dry up Did you go into the wireless room when Mr Miles was out?

BOYNE Me? Course not

FRANK. One of you must have mucked about with that set——

BOYNE It's the rats, Cap'n Jefferson Lot o' rats

still in this ship Ought to 'ave left it, but they didn't
Rats Rats

FRANK You're forgetting that the *Orsata* knows where we are I know how to deal with people like you I've logged you once already—and now if you don't give me that key and the liquor you've taken—you're for it

BOYNE I'm for it, eh, mister?

FRANK Yes And you may find yourself in irons in the *Orsata* And you know what'll happen after that

BOYNE No, mister I've had one packet—and I said to meself "they'll never get me again whatever I 'ave to do " Never again, never again, not for Paddy Boyne

Door opens and RIPTON looks in cautiously FRANK turns to glance at him, and instantly BOYNE whips a small iron bar out of his pocket and hits FRANK on the back of the head with it, knocking him out RIPTON stares in horror at FRANK on the floor

RIPTON 'Ere, Boyne—for Gawd's sake—y' aven't killed 'im, have you?

BOYNE No Knocked 'im cold, that's all 'Ere, Ripton (RIPTON *hesitates*) Come on (RIPTON *comes in slowly, reluctantly*) We'll 'ave to get him out of 'ere

RIPTON Listen, Boyne, you can't drag me into this Pinchin' a bottle or two o' whisky is one thing—but this——

BOYNE You're in this whether you bloody well like it or not, so you might as well put some guts into it

A sound behind makes them turn round hastily
MIRIAM enters from the back, followed by VELBURG

The two come forward and see FRANK on the floor, and then look at BOYNE and RIPTON who stand near, looking warily

Well?

MIRIAM Started a bit early, haven't you?

BOYNE That's the spirit I knew you'd know how to take it, girlie 'Ere though, what about Fritz? Who told 'im to come poking his nose in?

MIRIAM He's all right And they don't call him Fritz

BOYNE They're all Fritzes to me And I didn't ask 'im to push his bleedin' face into this business

MIRIAM No, but I did

BOYNE Oh—you did!

MIRIAM Yes Wait a moment Before you start your concert, what about getting rid of—him? (*Indicating FRANK*)

BOYNE You're right

MIRIAM Not dead, is he?

RIPTON No, no, no Just knocked out—he'll come to soon A kind of accident—it was——

MIRIAM A kind of accident

BOYNE And just watch out it don't happen to you, Fritz (*To RIPTON*) Come on I know where to put 'im

BOYNE and RIPTON—the latter not doing much—carry FRANK out left MIRIAM and VELBURG watch them steadily

VELBURG This is—very dangerous

MIRIAM Yes It might be

VELBURG I have never been before—concerned—in such a thing

MIRIAM Been a good boy, eh?

VELBURG Yes

MIRIAM And what have you got for it? All right, you needn't tell me You've told me once Nothing but the bird and the boot

VELBURG Bird and boot?

MIRIAM They've kicked you out of everywhere, haven't they? Wouldn't let you settle down Wouldn't leave you alone Just because you hadn't one of their damn silly passports And you hadn't done anybody any harm

VELBURG No, I have done no harm

MIRIAM All right then, start doing some harm, and see if that won't pay you better You can't be any worse off, kid You've admitted that yourself

VELBURG Yes—but what can I do? I—am afraid

As he stands looking helplessly at her, she goes across and puts a hand on each of his shoulders and looks closely at him

MIRIAM What's your first name?

VELBURG Carl Or Carlo

MIRIAM Come on then, Carlo, give me a smile Come on That's better

She suddenly leans forward and kisses him on the lips, then releases him He looks at her wonderingly

VELBURG You kiss very well

MIRIAM We'll have some more later on, Carlo
But just now—it's business Are you still frightened?

VELBURG No

MIRIAM Then stick to me And don't say too much,
specially to Boyne And don't take much notice of what
I say to him He's nothing—just useful, that's all But
you and me, Carlo, we can be friends, can't we?

VELBURG Yes

MIRIAM I know I'm no beauty—I leave that to
Dopy Diana out there—but looks aren't everything—
and anyhow I don't look too bad, do I? You didn't
mind, when I kissed you, did you?

VELBURG It was nice I think you would be a fine
girl to love

MIRIAM You never said a truer thing in your life,
Carlo And you're not going to be sorry you said it
I'll look after you Stick to me, kid, and don't say
too much

BOYNE and RIPTON *return left carrying two whiskey
bottles and some tin mugs*

BOYNE Well, he's all right Tied up and locked up
'Ere, let's 'ave a wet (*Pours whiskey into mugs, assisted
by RIPTON, and all take one*) Fritz, see if it's all clear
out there We've more light in here than we want

Turns lamp down

MIRIAM They're all in their cabins, I suppose?

BOYNE Except the little Professor, who's on look-
out And what he'll ever see, God knows

VELBURG *returns from back*

VELBURG There is nobody

BOYNE All right Now listen, Fritz When you got through to the *Orsata*, did you tell 'em how many people there was aboard 'ere?

VELBURG No The set was so bad, we only sent the S O S and our position

BOYNE Then all the bleedin' *Orsata* knows is that there's *some* people 'ere?

VELBURG Yes That is so

RIPTON What's the idea, Boyne?

BOYNE Cripes, I picked something up when I found you, didn't I? I've only to take one crack at yer, me little Cockney rat, then—over the side—and that's the end of Mr Snivelling little Ripton

RIPTON Honest, Boyne, I'm with yer, been with yer all the time Who got yer the whisky? I wouldn't go back on yer, mate I just wanted to know what the idea was, that's all—just asking—see?

BOYNE All right, all right This piece'ud make three better men than you Look at her

MIRIAM But when you've done looking at me, let's get down to business

BOYNE Just a minute, girle I like you You're all right But what's your idea, eh?

MIRIAM I can soon tell you that I've been sacked And not only that, but that dopy she-cat's going to make all the trouble she can for me, as soon as we're both off this ship She says I left her to drown

BOYNE And did yer?

MIRIAM Yes And I wish to God I'd drowned her myself And whatever happens I don't want to do a

day's work for her and her kind again as long as I live I'm going to strike out for myself—or finish Now then!

BOYNE 'Ear that, Ripton? That's the way to talk But where does Fritz 'ere come in?

MIRIAM He can't get a passport, so they won't let him stop anywhere

BOYNE Is that all, Fritz 'Aven't you ever done anything to anybody?

VELBURG No I have always been good

BOYNE Always been good An' I betcher 'ave too, Fritz You look it Aren't they a pair of "sissies!"

MIRIAM Well, he's through with it, aren't you, kid?

VELBURG Yes I think I can go on no longer now

MIRIAM Well, that's him And now I'll tell you where you stand, Mr Boyne You've just knocked out your officer I don't know what they can do to you for that——

BOYNE I do But they're not going to do it, see? They're not going to take me off a derelict—after me launching boats and puttin' their fires out—just to give me two years' 'ard labour Where am I after that, eh? Worse nor I am now Well, they're not going to do it to Paddy Boyne—see? 'Ere I say, a man's got his rights Let's 'ave turn an' turn about I've done my flamin' share, 'aven't I? Well, then, let me take a turn sittin' about with some nice clean clobber on—just ringin' bells

RIPTON That's all right, Boyne—but—er—I don't see where it gets yer I mean ter say, what can you do?

BOYNE Yer mean, what can *you* do, yer narrow-gutted little twirp!

RIPTON It's all right talking big like that, but what can yer do?

BOYNE I'll tell yer that when I'm ready to tell yer, Ripton But I can do a bleedin' lot, see?

MIRIAM Now just listen to me a minute There's two sorts o' people on this ship There's the people who've had it all their own way up to now Then there's people like us, who've never had a chance What happens to us when they come and rescue us? Are we going to be petted and made a fuss of? No fear! We're going to get even worse than we've had already And I've had enough of it These others, the lucky ones, they don't care a damn what happens to me or any of you Very well then, I don't care a damn what happens to them You hear? I don't care what happens to them

BOYNE You've got the right ideas

RIPTON I don't say you're not right, miss But it don't mean anything to me What can you do?

MIRIAM They don't know on the *Orsata* yet how many people there are left on this ship

RIPTON 'Ere—for God's sake!—

A noise at back startles them They wait, and then the PROFESSOR enters He is wearing a tweed hat at the back of his head and a light raincoat He has some field-glasses round his neck, and is smoking his pipe

PROFESSOR Having a midnight party?

BOYNE Just a tot before we turn in, Professor—at

least afore *they* turn in, 'cos I'll be on watch with you
Seen anything, Professor?

PROFESSOR No But the glass is going down

BOYNE That's bad news, Professor If we get a big sea, she'll shake us to bits in twelve hours We can't dodge it—see?—and some o' them plates forrard is buckled to hell If we're not picked up afore the sea starts on us, we're for it, Professor

PROFESSOR So I gather, Boyne But I've been talking to Mr Miles up in the wireless room—and though he's by no means an optimistic type and seems rather hysterical about the set he made being damaged—he thinks the *Orsata* ought to be here before we're in any real danger

BOYNE Has he mended that set, Professor?

PROFESSOR Not yet And I think he'd like some assistance

BOYNE Certainly Fritz, you go up to the wireless room again and see what you can do The sooner the *Orsata* gets our S O S and position again, the better You know that, don't you, Fritz?

VELBURG Yes, of course

BOYNE But that's all the *Orsata* does want, y'understand that, don't yer No time now for long fancy messages, eh?

VELBURG No

BOYNE That's right And when I'm on watch, I'll come and see how you're doing 'Ere—(*hands VELBURG a bottle about half full of whiskey*) I expect Mr Miles could do with a drink up there Give 'im that

VELBURG *nods, takes the bottle, and goes out*
Well, Professor, back on the job, eh? You might be missing something, you never know And I'll relieve you in about half-an-hour

PROFESSOR All right Or is it *Aye, aye* I find a certain satisfaction in this look-out business, you know Quite a new experience, and not without value

BOYNE That's right Professor, and keep a sharp look-out Lot o' funny things happen at sea—you'd be surprised

PROFESSOR *nods, gives them a last curious look, then goes* *There is complete and significant silence for a few moments*

RIPTON Glass is falling If it's a sudden sharp drop we might get a big sea

BOYNE So I've 'eard, so I've 'eard Aw—shut it! (*He looks at MIRIAM*) You've got something on your mind, haven't you, girl?

MIRIAM Yes

BOYNE Let's 'ave it

MIRIAM I was just thinking how it's a matter of luck whether you're alive or dead after one of these affairs Some of them who were drowned the other night, I'll bet they hated dying——

RIPTON An' I'll take my oath they did

MIRIAM Yet some of these people here who are expecting to be saved sometime to-morrow—the lucky ones, you'd say, they don't care whether they live or die——

RIPTON Course they do

BOYNE 'Ow d'you know? You keep quiet

MIRIAM That old woman—Mrs Westmoreland—she's about finished anyhow It'd save her a lot of trouble just to finish quietly That Professor hasn't long to go either

RIPTON You'll be telling me next that little American kid's got one foot in the grave——

BOYNE No, she's different I could use that little piece

MIRIAM She's fallen for Jefferson I've seen 'em together on deck Make a nice couple too—damn their eyes!

BOYNE These 'ere passengers—they're well off, aren't they?

MIRIAM Yes, of course They've all got money with 'em I'll bet that American—who's been doing the cooking—has got plenty

RIPTON Yes, he has Big dollar bills, not cheques—I've seen 'em

MIRIAM And all the women have jewellery My beauty's got at least a thousand pounds' worth with her I know Now—if the luck had been the other way and anything had happened to them—*suddenly*, so they couldn't take anything with 'em—we might have collected all that lot, and could easily have hidden it among our own things when we were taken off this ship We needn't stay on the *Orsata*, need we?

BOYNE No, we can blow at the first port Specially if she's calling somewhere in South America With a few hundred quid each, we could be like princes in South America Couldn't we, Ripton? Couldn't we?

RIPTON Yes—but——

BOYNE But what?

RIPTON There's Jefferson and Miles too

BOYNE Well, what of it?

RIPTON Eight of 'em altogether, eight of 'em
Gawd's trewth, Boyne, you couldn't do it And
they'd all have to go If there was just one of 'em left
it'd be finish 'Ere, you don't know what you're
saying Give it up, mate

BOYNE Why, yer little——

MIRIAM Just a minute! (*To RIPTON*) You're afraid,
aren't you?

RIPTON Course I am And who wouldn't be? Why
it's proper wholesale murder

MIRIAM Don't frighten yourself with words Acci-
dents are always happening, aren't they?

RIPTON Yes, but this wouldn't be no blinkin'
accident

MIRIAM Yes, it would Just another accident

BOYNE That's right Just an accident It might
'appen to you, Ripton, any minute

RIPTON 'Ere—steady——

MIRIAM Go on, nobody's going to hurt you And
who's going to know but us?

RIPTON Yes, but *I'd* know Every night when I got
to bed and turned the light out, I'd know I wouldn't
mind taking a chance—pinching something—but this
is different Bloody murder, this is

BOYNE 'Ere, an' what if a few does get killed They

said it's every man for hisself, don't they? An' look at the killing that goes on! Millions of 'em in the War An' Russia! And Germany! And China! And Spain! Killing 'em all the time

RIPTON That's different

BOYNE Yes, an' I'll tell you how it's different We don't get anything out of it, see? An' if we're not careful, we'll find we're all getting killed for nothing, just 'cos the ruddy fools don't know how to stop it Well then, let's have an accident or two, 'ere, an' get something out of it for once An' don't forget we've only to-night for certain To-morrow might be too late, an' we'll find ourselves in irons in the *Orsata*—and after that—nothing to look forward to but a year or two behind the bars and when we do get out, walking up and down the wet streets trying to raise the price of a fourpenny kip Use your imagination! That's your trouble You got no imagination

RIPTON I got plenty That's what's the matter with me, mate Eight of 'em!

MIRIAM Yes, and how many were drowned the other night, when our boat was smashed Ten, wasn't it?

BOYNE That's right Ten! Gone! Finished! And why? 'Cos that flamin' ship's boat was so old an' rotten she was just stuck together with paint Let 'em go to hell, I say, the bleeders! They made it ten We'll make it eight Unless you'd like to make it nine, Ripton

RIPTON Oh—Jesus! Don't keep on at me Leave me alone

While they are watching him, VALENTINE enters right He looks rumpled, and is in pyjamas, dressing-gown, slippers He is half-drunk

VALENTINE This is lucky (*They turn and stare at him*) There is, there is!

BOYNE Is what?

VALENTINE A drink That's what I'm looking for—a drink

MIRIAM If you ask me, I think you've had enough already

VALENTINE But I'm not asking you, my dear lady It's not a thing I'd ask any woman They don't know, don't understand I'm half-drunk and yet I can't sleep One or two more and then I might stop thinking

Finds a mug and holds it out unsteadily to BOYNE, who has the bottle

MIRIAM You'll be in the rats soon if you're not careful

VALENTINE The rats have been at me for years Thank you, Commander Boyne!

BOYNE Well—if you must have it

Gives VALENTINE some and then pours another for himself

MIRIAM You see—this is one of 'em

VALENTINE One of what, my not very dear and most embittered young woman? One of what?

MIRIAM One of the lucky ones Had everything you want, from the word *go* Think drinks and clothes and roast chickens grow on trees Had so much, you grumble because they haven't given you the moon

VALENTINE Practically my own words But don't forget, the moon's the thing We're quite right to grumble because we haven't been given the moon No moon, and what is it all? The drinks are just—drinks The clothes—just something to wear Food's just food All routine Pleasure's a routine just the same as duty, work——

BOYNE Well, let me have a crack at pleasure I know all about duty and work

VALENTINE Yes, my dear fellow—but you're really an innocent You think it will be all right somewhere just round the corner, where there's more beer and women and less rail painting and scraping But that's where I live—round that corner—and it's nothing, just a routine But—up—there—the moon, with her old enchantment—ah!—that's very different So I say—with your permission—madam—give us the moon The moon now—or nothing

BOYNE Cripes, I thought I'd got a load on to-night, but when I listen to you, mister, I feel stone sober

MIRIAM There's a ship coming as fast as she can, just to rescue you Do you think you're worth it?

VALENTINE Have I ever said I was? (*Stops because VELBURG enters left VALENTINE points at him rather waveringly*) Give this young man a drink And look at him Can you see anything the matter with him?

MIRIAM No, because there isn't anything the matter with him

VALENTINE Yet this young man's treated as if he were a leper or a homicidal maniac And why? Because

he can't get a passport Now I have a passport Valentine Avon, British subject, author, age thirty-eight Age—a thousand! And a passport to what? Nowhere I want to go, because I've been The moon—yes, but the passport won't take me there Now he'd be glad to stay anywhere—just to stay, and work and marry and bring up children and drink beer and listen to brass bands I say, he ought to have my passport, any of our passports—and why? Justice at last Life to those who want to live (*Drinks*)

MIRIAM Well, that's you What about the rest of you here?

VALENTINE Except the two youngsters, Jefferson and Miss Stockton—we're all finished We're dinosaurs and mammoths and sabre-toothed tigers—done for—nearly extinct They ought to be sending a museum for us—not a ship Perhaps they are

Begins laughing idiotically

MIRIAM Go on

VALENTINE Certainly not And I consider you a most dangerous woman Gentlemen, I don't know anything about her, but I consider her a most dangerous woman Earlier to-night I caught sight of an expression on her face—devilish!

MIRIAM You're drunk

VALENTINE And I'll tell you a secret I've been drunk for years Can't stand it all, otherwise (*Moves carefully a step or two away from them*) Thank you, Commander Boyne, for your hospitality I think you said I was off-duty, eh?

BOYNE Yes, sailor Turn in

VALENTINE Very soon I'll be either sick or unconscious Touch and go—which Good-night

VALENTINE *goes out carefully right and they watch him without stirring*

MIRIAM (*pointedly to RIPTON*) You heard him? And that's what he thinks about his little lot (*To VELBURG*) You too, kid Told you himself, didn't he? You're fit to live and he isn't Didn't he say that?

RIPTON Aw, he didn't know what he was saying

BOYNE But I know what I'm saying, Ripton You're either in with us now or you're going over the side And no more backchat

RIPTON I won't touch 'em——

BOYNE Who's asking you to? All you've to do is what I tell you and keep your mouth shut (*Sharply to VELBURG*) Is that set fixed again?

VELBURG No Not yet It will take an hour or two.

BOYNE That's right You go to the Professor and tell him he's relieved I'm going on watch Then go back to the wireless room and watch Miles Go on, sharp to it, Fritz

MIRIAM Go on, kid I'll come up there soon

VELBURG Very well (*He goes out back*)

BOYNE I'm going to leave 'em for another hour—so's they'll be all fast asleep when we hustle 'em out Ripton, you go along there, and see nobody's prowling about And get some paper and straw

RIPTON What for?

BOYNE 'Cos when I'm ready, I'm going to set it alight—and then tell 'em the fire's broken out again along there—and rush 'em out Go on, Ripton Out!

RIPTON *goes out hastily*

MIRIAM We mustn't give 'em time to take their things——

BOYNE Not likely We'll frighten them to death and then we'll rush 'em on here—and I'll tell 'em the tale And I'll have a nice place ready for 'em—out on the fo'c'sle head Everything's gone to hell along there—plates rotten—it'll be pitch dark and the sea's getting up

MIRIAM What if they won't go on there?

BOYNE Then that's disobeying orders and just too bad, girlie And you're going to help me to put the fear of God into 'em, when the alarm goes Eh?

MIRIAM You watch me

BOYNE That's the girl Y'know—you an' me—we could turn a trick or two, couldn't we? (*As if going to embrace her*)

MIRIAM (*with a slight turn, eluding him*) Yes, big boy, but let's turn this one first—and do it right—or we'll never see another Don't forget that

BOYNE Me! I was born for this Just been waiting for it all me life Now listen, stay here till the Professor's out of the way We don't want him seeing too much, silly as he looks Kid him along a bit, if you like, but see he turns in before you go

MIRIAM All right But he's easy I'll——

BOYNE Quiet

The PROFESSOR, dressed as before, slowly enters from back

Now then, Professor, did Fritz tell yer to come off duty?

PROFESSOR Yes

BOYNE That's right Done yer trick for the night now, Professor Yer can turn in Seen anything?

PROFESSOR No

BOYNE Didn't expect yer would But don't worry, we'll all be out o' this by morning Just so long as the fire doesn't start again Well, I'll go and have a dam' good look at nothing 'Night, Professor

PROFESSOR Good-night, Boyne Oh—by the way—do you know where Mr Jefferson is?

BOYNE Jefferson! Down in his cabin asleep—long since—isn't he?

PROFESSOR No I've just looked It's empty

BOYNE Well, there's other cabins, y'know, Professor Sailors don't care! Don't you worry about him He probably wouldn't like you to

Goes A pause

MIRIAM That little American girl's taken a great fancy to Mr Jefferson y'know

PROFESSOR Yes, I understood the implication But it's not true, because I spoke to Miss Stockton not ten minutes ago She couldn't go to sleep, so came out on deck

MIRIAM Well, she's not the only one here I know another beauty Know her only too well Better not be too curious, Professor It doesn't always pay

MRS WESTMORELAND *comes in right as if suddenly awakened*

MRS WESTMORELAND Is the ship really on fire again?

BOYNE Oh no—missis—we're just having a little smoking concert—for the benefit o' seamen's charities Stand over there

MRS WESTMORELAND Why isn't Mr Jefferson in charge?

BOYNE 'Cos *he* isn't here, and I am—see?

MRS WESTMORELAND Yes, but——

BOYNE Oh—shut it—can't yer? Come on with that other one What the hell's the matter with 'er?

MRS WESTMORELAND I don't like this

VALENTINE No, not very enjoyable, is it?

MRS WESTMORELAND I don't mean that I mean, there's something wrong about this

BOYNE There'll be something a lot more wrong with it, if you don't keep quiet, old party Fire's broken out again—amidships—and the sea's getting up—and you go squawking and arguing as if you're at a tea party Keep quiet and do as you're told

Sounds of voices—DIANA's and MIRIAM's—through doorway right and some scuffling

MIRIAM (*off right, loudly*) And I tell you—you can't get your things——

DIANA (*off, almost screaming*) I suppose you'd like them——

BOYNE (*shouting*) Shove 'er in 'ere. An' if there's

any more trouble with 'er, I'll knock 'er on the head
Come on

MIRIAM, *who is dressed as in SCENE I pushes DIANA, who is wearing a wrap as if just hustled out of bed, in through the doorway right, and follows her in*

DIANA Don't tell me you're trying to save my life—
when only two days ago you left me to drown——

BOYNE Come on, you Stand there, an' keep quiet
Think we've nothing else to do but listen to you, Greta Garbo
Now shut up the lot of yer an' let me talk.
(*Quietly, to MIRIAM*) Where's Ripton?

MIRIAM I don't know Gone to look for the
Professor, I think

BOYNE I'd forgotten the Professor

NONA Where's Frank Jefferson?

BOYNE Are *you* starting again?

NONA I want to know where he is

BOYNE He's hurt himself—so I'm in charge—and
don't forget it——

NONA Hurt himself?

BOYNE Yes—an' you're going to hurt *yourself* if yer
don't keep quiet—see, kid? (*Suddenly grasps her arm*)

NONA Let me go Uncle!

MYRICKS, *at this appeal, tries to intervene, but*
BOYNE, *still holding NONA, shoves him back with his*
other hand, the one still holding the bar

BOYNE (*pulling NONA easily across and then almost*
throwing her back behind him) You go there—and stay
there—till I tell yer to move

MIRIAM Boyne, you know what I told you—about this girl You can't get away with it

BOYNE I know, I know (*Looks at the rest*) Now listen You see what's happened? Fire's broken out again, sea's getting up——

MRS WESTMORELAND There's something wrong with all this Mr Avon, why don't you do something?

VALENTINE (*coming forward*) Just a minute, Boyne

BOYNE Just a minute nothing

Steps forward, puts a hand on VALENTINE's face and pushes him back sharply

Now another word from any one of yer—an' I don't care which it is, man or woman—an' I lay yer flat with this 'Cos yer've 'ad it easy all yer life and you're passengers, yer think yer've nothing to do but scream and argue

RIPTON, *looking troubled, enters from back* BOYNE
turns

Found 'im?

RIPTON Found who?

BOYNE Professor

RIPTON No I wasn't looking for him

BOYNE You be careful (*Addresses passengers again, in another tone*) So—as I said—I've got to put you all in a nice safe place—where you won't come to no harm——

RIPTON. No, don't go! It's—murder

BOYNE Yer bleedin' little rat!

He jumps forward, and knocks out RIPTON There is a startled cry from the passengers, a scream from DIANA

MIRIAM Oh—be quiet—you

BOYNE Clean off his nut, that Ripton Lost his nerve, see? That's what happens Anybody else going the same way 'ud better speak up now

The PROFESSOR enters left, dressed exactly as in SCENE I, and keeping his hands in the pockets of his raincoat

MRS WESTMORELAND Professor Pawlet——

BOYNE Shut up Come on, Professor, if yer don't want ter do us all in

PROFESSOR Boyne——

BOYNE Don't you start now! Get up there

PROFESSOR Just a listen moment, Boyne

BOYNE *makes a move towards him*

I said, listen! I am sorry for you, Boyne It is our fault—I mean, the fault of our society—and not really your fault You are what we've made you We have no right to expect anything better Though I must condemn you, I don't blame you I am truly sorry And if we live, we must change this society of ours We must condemn and execute that, so that these things cannot happen again Patrick Boyne—say *God have mercy upon me*

BOYNE (*wondering, awed, deeply uneasy*) God have mercy upon me (*Then with growing suspicion and anger*) 'Ere, what is all this? What are yer trying on?

PROFESSOR I'm sorry, Boyne

BOYNE Sorry me——!

He lifts his iron bar and is about to jump across at the

PEOPLE AT SEA

ACT II

PROFESSOR, *who pulls a revolver out of his overcoat pocket and fires almost point blank at BOYNE, who falls, shudders, and is still* There is a terrible scream—of despair rather than fright—from MIRIAM The PROFESSOR *looks down sadly at BOYNE*

PROFESSOR And God have mercy upon us all

END OF ACT II

ACT III

About two hours later Lighting as before BOYNE's body not visible now PROFESSOR and FRANK discovered Latter looks as if he had been knocked about His head is roughly bound in handkerchief PROFESSOR is smoking his pipe and now holds out a match for FRANK's cigarette

FRANK Yes, but they were all in it, y'know, sir

PROFESSOR No, not really Ripton says he was bullied into pretending to help them, and after all, he got himself knocked out shouting a warning Velburg played no active part in it As for that woman——

FRANK You're not going to tell me, sir, *she* didn't know all about it

PROFESSOR I think it was probably her idea I thought from the first that young woman had a very dangerous look She's an old Testament character

FRANK Well then, what are we going to do with her?

PROFESSOR Try the New Testament on her

FRANK You'd let off the three of them?

PROFESSOR Yes Pardon's the word for all You seem surprised

FRANK I am, sir I don't understand you, Professor You don't want anything to happen to these three, yet you didn't hesitate to shoot Boyne

PROFESSOR True Boyne had to be killed, y'know We could never have done anything with him There's something to be said for this method It's the revolutionary style of dealing with criminals Either you are sudden, sharp, quite merciless—or you are free-and-easy and let 'em go An old society with its elaborate codes and punishment, only succeeds in making life enemies of its delinquents It's much more inhuman really

FRANK I can't see that

PROFESSOR Think it over I'm going to let the woman out, but I shan't tell her yet that she's been forgiven

Goes out FRANK, *who is still unsteady from his crack on the head, goes up carefully towards door at back, to look out, but obviously doesn't feel up to it and comes back to lean against a table* DIANA, *now lightly dressed and looking very attractive, enters* FRANK, *who has not noticed her entrance, gives a slight groan*

DIANA You poor boy! Does it still hurt?

FRANK I'm afraid it does a bit, thanks, Miss Lismore

DIANA That hasn't been properly attended to yet, y'know

FRANK No—but—you see—Nona Stockton offered to do it—but I said—it didn't matter yet——

DIANA Oh—but *of course* it matters We're all depending on you And you should come first

FRANK Oh—it isn't so bad, thanks And, you see, as everybody was awake—and we could all do with some hot coffee and food after the excitement, I told Nona

—Miss Stockton—to go and help her uncle in the pantry——

DIANA Yes, of course—but you must let me look after you

Puts a hand on his shoulder and looks down at him, rather seductively

I'm not *quite* useless, y'know—and I can't have you thinking I am I know I could make you much more comfortable I have some liniment in my cabin that would help to stop the ache—and you could take one of my tablets I'm so terrified of pain that I always have plenty of things to stop it Now——

FRANK Well—it's very decent of you, Miss Lismore—but I couldn't think of——

DIANA Please Just for my sake I've felt so useless, so far—and that's *very* bad for me I get depressed, and you wouldn't want me to feel depressed would you? (*She puts a hand on his arm, and he rises, still uneasy Sound of voices—the PROFESSOR's and MIRIAM's off left*) People coming Let's hurry It's very bad for you to have people worrying you

She leads him out MIRIAM enters looking a tragic figure, and the PROFESSOR follows They are talking as they enter

MIRIAM What's the use of talking?

PROFESSOR, Don't say that I earn my living by talking

MIRIAM Yes, and you've been lucky What do you know about life? Colleges and all that *You* weren't brought up in a slum

PROFESSOR I was In Salford Back-to-back houses
And it was worse in my time than in yours

MIRIAM Anyhow, *you* got out of it

PROFESSOR So did you And haven't you been all
over the place with your mistresses? California, too
What more do you want? Young woman, there's a
lot wrong here—(*he makes a wide circle*)—in the world,
outside ourselves But don't forget there can still be
things wrong here—(*he taps his forehead, then his heart*)—
inside ourselves That's where the devils and the
witches live now

MIRIAM You're not so bad—the best of this lot

PROFESSOR And *you* were the best of your little lot

MIRIAM I'm not sorry y'know I don't care a damn,
do you hear?

MILES *puts his head in He is very excited*

MILES The *Orsata's* quite near Tell Jefferson The
set's working and I'm getting messages all the time
Ask 'em to bring me some coffee

He disappears

PROFESSOR That's good news

MIRIAM For you, not for me

PROFESSOR Did you ever read or see *Macbeth*?

MIRIAM No

PROFESSOR You ought to try it

VELBURG *enters at back and stands looking at them
uncertainly* MIRIAM *sees him and suddenly lights up*

MIRIAM You all right, kid?

VELBURG I am not hurt But I feel bad

MIRIAM Come on, Carlo, give me a smile (*As VELBURG shakes his head miserably*) Come on now (*She smiles at him and finally he smiles back at her*) That's better

VELBURG Not very much better, I think

As they look at one another, and the PROFESSOR observes them curiously, MYRICKS looks in at the door right

MYRICKS Come and get it, folks Hot coffee—and scrambled eggs mother used to make

PROFESSOR Miles says the *Orsata's* quite near and he's getting messages all the time And he wants some coffee up there

MYRICKS Fine! I'll pass the word along Well, come and get it

Withdraws The PROFESSOR looks at the other two, who have shown no interest

PROFESSOR You'd better come and have something to eat and drink, y'know

MIRIAM I couldn't touch it You have some, Carlo

VELBURG shakes his head, PROFESSOR gives them another look, then goes off briskly right VELBURG comes forward slowly and sits down, looking miserable and shaken

VELBURG It is no use Nobody will ever give me a passport now I will never have a country only more and more prison and then put on ships again

MIRIAM You're not going to cry, are you, Carlo?

VELBURG No

MIRIAM Don't you It's not worth it, none of it—what we've had and haven't got any more, what we've missed—none of it Is it?

VELBURG I don't know

MIRIAM Oh—kid!

She stands above him and takes his head in her hands, bending it back to her breast, leans forward and kisses him, then holds his head on her breast, all with great tenderness as well as passion

Could you have loved me?

VELBURG Yes—I think so

MIRIAM Yes, I know you could I know I could have made you—even though you didn't care much at first So long as I had you to myself You like me, don't you?

VELBURG Yes You are strong and kind

MIRIAM Then you'd have loved me—afterwards, I know you would

VELBURG Yes Though there was a girl——

MIRIAM Don't tell me Pretend to yourself I'm that girl, if you like, only don't tell me

She clasps him to her closely, and they remain like that for a moment, then he slowly releases himself

VELBURG What will they do to you—do you know?

MIRIAM Oh—I'm for it now all right

VELBURG What do you think happens to you—when you are dead?

MIRIAM Now, I've thought about that Sometimes I think you're just snuffed out—y'know, fall asleep and

never wake up And that's what I usually think But sometimes I've thought you might walk straight into another sort of life, like this—with people and houses and all that—but different, like it is when you dream sometimes

VELBURG I would not mind that—just to sleep—or a different kind of life But what if God is waiting there, as the priest says? Perhaps they will ask me for my passport all over again

MIRIAM Not they! If there is angels and that, they'd have more sense But there isn't, y'know All made up, that Just to keep you quiet and take your money Don't you worry, kid It's either a long sleep or a different, better life, where some don't get all the bad luck (*Pauses, then softly*) Why did you ask?

VELBURG I was—thinking

MIRIAM I'll go, Carlo, if you will I couldn't go by myself and I don't suppose you could—could you?

VELBURG No, I am afraid—afraid!

MIRIAM But two of us together—my arms around you—and I wouldn't leave go—and it 'ud be all right Can you swim?

VELBURG Not much

MIRIAM I can't at all So it couldn't last long And we'd be together If there wasn't anything else, we'd never know, and if there was—y'know, another sort of life—we'd start it together——

VELBURG No, I'm afraid

MIRIAM You've got much more to be frightened

of, if we don't There'll be prison again, more of it this time, and then what?

VELBURG You need not tell me——

MIRIAM Why should we let 'em have the laugh of us? Let's get out and stay out, so they can't touch us In a few hours, we might never have another chance to be together, and then we'll wish we'd finished it now Here—(*she raises him to his feet*)—now put your arms round me—tight (*He puts his arms round her and she clasps him closely and kisses him Then*) You're not afraid now, are you?

VELBURG No

MIRIAM Let's go then, and go for good I'll see nothing hurts you, boy, and it'll soon be all over

VELBURG All right

As they are looking at one another, and she is smiling at him tenderly, RIPTON enters right MIRIAM turns to look at him

MIRIAM Well?

RIPTON 'Ere, I wanted to 'ave a word with you two

MIRIAM There's not much time What have you to say?

RIPTON Well, I just wanted to 'ave a word or two

MIRIAM Have you found a passport for him?

RIPTON No, of course I 'aven't 'Ow could I?

MIRIAM Perhaps you know where there's a fine new life for us, eh? With no more prison, no more insults, no more ordering about all day and all night, and everything different and better than it is now, eh?

RIPTON No, of course not What d'you take me for?
An' what's the idea, any'ow?

MIRIAM Will you do something for me?

RIPTON Depends What is it?

MIRIAM Take a message from me to Diana Lismore,
and give it to her when she's by herself Tell her I'm
sorry for her now, because this minute I'm what she'll
never be again—I'm happy and content And tell
her——

RIPTON 'Ere, steady on, what's all this?

MIRIAM Tell her I'm going where she daren't go
And I'm glad to go, and sorry for her

RIPTON I'll never remember all that

MIRIAM You'll remember it the rest of your life
(*She turns away and goes close to VELBURG*) Is it all right,
Carlo?

VELBURG I am afraid

MIRIAM Why, there's nothing to be afraid of
There's nothing to be afraid of ever again I *am* happy
and content It's true, it's true I knew there was
something I was meant to do—in the end Every-
thing's always pointed to this, all my life Whether you
come with me or not, I'm going now

RIPTON Going where—for Gawd's sake?

MIRIAM Where the rats can't get at me (*Turns to
VELBURG*) Are you coming with me, kid? I'll hold you
close You won't be afraid

She looks at him tenderly and kisses him

VELBURG But—your eyes are so bright and
you look oh! I think now you are beautiful

MIRIAM Then we'll go now

They go off entwined, while RIPTON, who is not too bright after the bang he got in the last scene, gapes after them, completely bewildered After a moment, he realises what is happening

RIPTON 'Erel Hi! For Gawd's sake! (*Then he runs out at the back, and we hear him shouting*) Mr Jefferson! Mr Jefferson!

DIANA enters right with FRANK She is clearly doing everything she can to attract him

DIANA Come and sit down

RIPTON enters from the back

RIPTON Mr Jefferson!

FRANK I'd better go and see what's happening

RIPTON Mr Jefferson!

DIANA Why should you? You've done quite enough for these ridiculous people

RIPTON Mr Jefferson! Mr Jefferson!

FRANK I'm afraid I must go

DIANA stands aside to let JEFFERSON go out back with RIPTON DIANA moves slowly up after him, but is stopped by NONA, who enters quickly

NONA Just a minute I want to talk to you

DIANA stops The two eye one another

DIANA Yes, but I'm not sure I want to listen

NONA You're going to listen whether you want to or not

DIANA Really!

NONA Really nothing You needn't put on that Mayfair Dowager act with me because it won't get across You—you man-stealer!

DIANA Aren't you being very silly and offensive?

NONA Yes, I expect I am I wouldn't be surprised at all how silly and offensive I'm being But that's not going to stop me telling you the truth You see, I love Frank Jefferson, and he loves me As soon as I can marry him, I'm going to

DIANA And what do I do—congratulate you?

NONA No, what you do is to keep out of it Do you think I don't know what you've been trying to do to-night? I suppose you imagine I'm jealous?

DIANA Yes Aren't you?

NONA I am a bit—at that Any girl would be But that's not the point

DIANA It sounds like it

NONA Well, it isn't The point is, I'm not going to stand by and watch you brushing up your technique on my young man I don't think it's come to much so far—and I'll see it doesn't—but even if it had, I wouldn't blame him, I'd blame you For an old hand like you, it'd be money for nothing with a boy who's hardly been allowed off his ship yet Like taking a nickel from a baby!

DIANA I've not the least desire to listen to any more of this—do you mind?

NONA But I haven't finished yet And if you think you're going to duck the rest of it by going out there, you're wrong, because I'll follow you out there and tell

you the rest at the top of my voice They can hear it I don't give a damn, because this is important to me So are you going to stay here and listen or take it out there?

DIANA *does not reply but turns and comes down a little and sits*

NONA Just remember, this isn't the stage or motion pictures, it's real life You're not dealing now with phoney *glamour* and *passion*, but with the feelings of real people, who can be hurt like hell And you're not going to try and bust up my life and Frank's, just to pass a few hours, and get away with it I want Frank—and I know we can be happy together in our own way—and no faded old glamour girl——

DIANA My God—you *are* a little swine

NONA No, I'm not I admired you once—and I was ready to be friendly—I was friendly—until you started this little game to-night Just to amuse yourself What do *you* care about him? What do *you* care about anybody but yourself?

DIANA You know nothing whatever about me

NONA I know this—that if there was ever a world where women like you really meant anything—except as little bits of decoration—it's finished now You're out, and we're in I don't think even on the stage and in motion pictures we'll want women like you any more Frank and I are going to have to live in a world where you don't sit round being glamorous and taking all you can get, but where you have to work and bring up children and get along with your neighbours When I'm your age, I don't expect I'll look like you—I shan't have had the time and money to doll myself up as

you've done—but at least I'll *be* somebody, somebody real and strong and useful—and not just a——

DIANA Stop it! You've said quite enough You've taken care to tell me how much older I am than you—it's true, of course,—well, let me ask you now to stop insulting a woman so much older than yourself It looks as if this new world of yours is going to be chiefly distinguished for its bad manners And by the time you're my age—and that won't be long, though you think it will—you may realise then how hard and cruel the youngest generation can be, and perhaps you'll remember this conversation Please go now

NONA. All right I didn't mean——

DIANA I don't care what you meant

NONA Okay

MRS WESTMORELAND, *now fully dressed, enters briskly She is carrying a piece of paper, and is in great spirits*

MRS WESTMORELAND I looked in at the wireless operator and that very minute he was taking down a message for me that had been sent to this ship—of course we hadn't got it, but the *Orsata* had picked it up—she's very near now, by the way—and had managed to give it to our wireless officer—to tell me that my second girl Rhoda—she lives at Oxford, her husband's a don there—has a boy—which is all very comforting—though I don't know that I was very much worried about Rhoda—strong as a horse really——

She goes out with NONA After a few moments,

RIPTON *looks in at the back, and then comes slowly forward*

RIPTON Miss Lismore! (*As DIANA ignores him, coming forward again*) She told me to give it to you when you were by yourself, see?

She merely makes an impatient movement, as if to wave him away

Yes, but—she's gone, y'know

DIANA Why are you worrying me now? What is it?

RIPTON That Miriam She's gone, y'know

DIANA You mean—— She committed suicide?

RIPTON Yerss Jumped into the sea with that Velburg Proper suicide pact, it was I come in 'ere, and there they was, the pair of 'em——

DIANA Yes, but what was it you said? About giving me something?

RIPTON That's right A message An' I said "I'll never remember all that" an' she says, giving me an awful look, "You'll remember it the rest of your life" She knew all right

DIANA Oh—don't go on and on I don't think I want to hear it anyway

RIPTON Oh! but—I must tell yer, I promised, see? And she's gone—— She said "Tell her I'm sorry for her now because this minute I'm what she'll never be again—I'm happy an' content" she says Then she says "Tell 'er I'm going where she daren't go An' I'm glad to go," she says, "and sorry for her" That's it 'Ave you got it?

DIANA *now deeply distressed, waves him away* He

waits a moment, then goes out right She begins to sob, not noisily but with a suggestion of tearing force, wringing her hands She chokes back a final sob, then slowly opens her bag and takes out a tiny gold case She looks at it, and finally shakes out on to her palm some small white tablets, and as she looks at these, VALENTINE enters at back

VALENTINE (*coming down*) Diana Mrs Westmoreland said——

He notices what she is doing, and hurriedly limps towards her

What are you doing?

He knocks her hand up so that the tablets are spilt She springs up in a tearful fury, trying to hit him

DIANA You damned fool! They were all I had

He seizes her hands, holding them while she struggles
Let me go—let me go

VALENTINE (*holding her hands*) Quiet now, Diana
Quiet Quiet

She stops struggling, and he pushes her gently back into her chair She buries her face in her hands

What's the matter? Tell me, Diana Then you'll feel better Was it because of that maid of yours?

He finds one of the tablets on the table, picks it up and examines it curiously but distastefully

What's this stuff? Is it the stuff you doped yourself with when you came on board?

DIANA Yes

VALENTINE And you were just going to take some more, eh?

DIANA If you want to know, I was just going to take the lot

VALENTINE Why?

DIANA I feel I'm through with everything I can't explain, can't talk about it

VALENTINE You'd better tell me

DIANA I can't And what's the use?

VALENTINE (*quietly, after a pause*) Diana! You wouldn't like to help *me*, would you?

DIANA What do you mean?

VALENTINE I feel like death

DIANA That's a hang-over I suppose you were tight again last night

VALENTINE Yes, I gather I was And what a time to choose! We were all nearly for it, y'know It was touch and go I was tight—and Ripton says I wandered in here and told Boyne we weren't worth saving, and he took me at my word That was *my* contribution to this adventure A very fine fellow I am

DIANA We're a bright pair We weren't like that—before—were we?

VALENTINE No, only half-way—or rather more than half-way—towards what we are now But it was all waiting for us You wanted more and more sensations I was afraid of reality, afraid of my own sober thoughts

DIANA I know what you mean Oh!—Val—how can I help you or anyone else? I can't even help myself

VALENTINE Don't try to help yourself Help me I need it I'm down You may feel better when we get on the *Orsata* But I shan't, I shall feel worse

DIANA You did love me once, didn't you? Don't tell me now that that was unreal too?

VALENTINE No, it was as real as anything could be that happened to me

DIANA That doesn't sound very convincing

VALENTINE I'm not trying to please you now, Diana I'm trying to talk cold truth

DIANA But I'm a woman—and terribly unhappy—and I don't know that I want cold truth Is it true that everything's changing, that we'll soon be in a different kind of world that won't want us—at least me—all ungracious and busy and hard—like—like so many of the boys and girls one meets nowadays?

VALENTINE I've said something like that to you myself, Diana, almost thrown it in your face, but when you say it, something—I don't know what it is—a deep fellow-feeling—affection—perhaps real love—begins to stir in me I'm all on your side, and I want to say "Damn your new world, this is mine" Meaning—you

DIANA I suppose I'm not very much good really now I was once, but somehow I've changed It's terrible when you suddenly wake up and see how much you must have changed And yet—inside—you feel the same I can't help you, can I? You said that just to try to comfort me, didn't you? You're very sweet really, Val

VALENTINE No, I meant it I'm right down, Diana, and I've been down some time, and I know I can't get up again by myself I'm not strong enough, not hopeful enough—it's too much for me

DIANA But I'm down too—much further than you

God knows what might have happened to me in another minute, if you hadn't come in! What's the use of somebody as weak as that, to you or anybody else?

VALENTINE But don't you see—that's the very point We can help each other Just because we know we're weak and a bit unreal and rather hopeless Other people would never understand and give it up But you and I—we know Diana, help me I'll help you We'll start again together

DIANA We could, I suppose But—what as?

VALENTINE Anything you like Friends Lovers Husband and wife—no, that's not possible—you're still——

DIANA No, I've been free for the last two years

VALENTINE You kept it very quiet

DIANA Yes Well?

VALENTINE Diana, I'm crocked, and I drink like a fish My work's bad and I no longer believe in it, and I haven't much money left Will you marry me?

DIANA Val, I'm broke I can't get decent parts any longer I'm as irritable as the devil, and I've got some of the worst habits any woman could possibly have I'm extravagant and idiotic, and I can't cook, mend, or do anything useful And I will, God help you!

They kiss She smiles at him a moment

Pick up those tablets, darling They cost me the earth and I don't know where I'll get any more

VALENTINE No (*He crunches them with his foot*)

DIANA Val!

VALENTINE Well?

DIANA I'll try, honestly I will, darling But God help the first whisky bottle I catch near you

MYRICKS *enters, with a piece of paper in his hand*

MYRICKS This is a laugh! I got a cable about United Utilities Say, what's happened to you two?

DIANA We've gone mad

MYRICKS Keep right on! You're doing fine!

VALENTINE Never mind about us Tell us about yourself and United Utilities Are you a multi-millionaire—or are you broke?

MYRICKS (*chuckling*) Well, what do you think?

DIANA Multi-millionaire

MYRICKS (*chuckling harder than ever*) Wrong I'm broke Listen to this *All in the red stop and what haven't they done to that stock stop Charlie and Rubens have ducked it probably Mexico stop keep out of New York unless you've learnt to play the ukulele and can come back as four Hawaiians*

He roars with laughter, and, after a brief moment of bewilderment DIANA and VALENTINE *begin laughing too*

VALENTINE But does that mean you're broke?

MYRICKS Completely busted and I haven't got one red cent left in New York State I'll bet they're selling my golf clubs to pay taxes right now' and all I've got left is what I have with me—about seven hundred dollars—and a thousand dollars I left in a bank in San Francisco——

VALENTINE Seventeen hundred dollars? Could you start another financial career on that?

MYRICKS I could, but I'm not going to I'm going out West, to cook Why should I spend the rest of my life, selling stock to people I don't like, when I could be dishing up ham and eggs to folk I do like? I've worried about the market for thirty years Let somebody else do the worrying now You won't catch me even reading the papers——

A siren sounds faintly RIPTON enters at the back, very excited

RIPTON Oy, oy! She's there

VALENTINE What—the Orsata?

RIPTON Yes Listen!

They listen and then, after a moment, we hear again, from far away, the sound of a siren

That's 'er, that's 'er, all right

VALENTINE There!

NONA (*appearing at the back, excitedly*) Uncle, we're going to send off a rocket Gosh—I think this is grand!

She and RIPTON go to the rail MYRICKS, followed by DIANA and VALENTINE, move up towards them MRS WESTMORELAND and the PROFESSOR enter The PROFESSOR is carrying his manuscript

MRS WESTMORELAND Did I hear somebody say the Orsata's here?

MYRICKS Yes We're sending up a rocket

MRS WESTMORELAND Oh—I adore rockets

A rushing sound outside

MYRICKS There she goes!

A sudden red-and-white glare outside, which quickly fades

MRS WESTMORELAND Oh!—I've seen much better rockets What's the matter, Professor Pawlet?

PROFESSOR (*exhibiting MS*) This work has been my companion now for the last five years, and I am no longer young

DIANA (*with comic dismay*) You're not going to read it to us, are you?

PROFESSOR (*sadly*) No, I've just discovered something about it After these last two or three days with you, I've suddenly discovered—I saw it quite clearly not half an hour ago—that this isn't true I don't know yet what is true—but, by Heaven, I know this is not If I take it with me to the *Orsata*—I believe I shall never have the courage to destroy it

A faint hail "Zillah, ahoy!" off FRANK and NONA come hurrying into sight at the back

FRANK (*shouting*) *Orsata, ahoy! (To the others)* It's the boat from the *Orsata*

DIANA We're saved

They are all crowding along the rail, looking down and off, except PROFESSOR who is still sitting with his MS and MRS WESTMORELAND who is standing near him PROFESSOR begins tearing his MS

MRS WESTMORELAND Why—Professor Pawlet——?

PROFESSOR Yes, we owe thanks to God for our

deliverance and his mercy (*Gives her some sheets to tear*)
And there are worse ways of praising him

*He tears and she begins to tear, while the others look
at the approaching boat The sky beyond is now red with
dawn and some light from the water catches the faces
of those at the back*

END OF PLAY